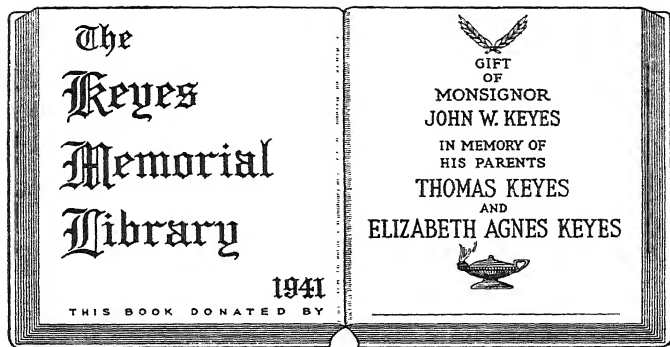


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THE SHADOW ON THE EARTH

By OWEN FRANCIS DUDLEY

WILL MEN BE LIKE GODS ?

THE SHADOW ON THE EARTH

THE MASTERFUL MONK

PAGEANT OF LIFE

THE COMING OF THE MONSTER

These five books constitute the first five
of the series of which *The Tremaynes*
and *the Masterful Monk* is the sixth.

The Shadow on the Earth

A Tale of Tragedy and Triumph

BY

OWEN FRANCIS DUDLEY

Author of Will Men be like Gods? etc.

PROBLEMS OF HUMAN HAPPINESS. II.

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NOTE

THIS present volume is the second of a series. 'Though complete in itself, it deals with only one aspect of a very big matter—the problem of human happiness. It should be read in conjunction with *Will Men be like Gods?* the first of the series, which it follows.

May I mention that I am fully aware of the sensational character of much that I have related here. I make no apology for the same. It is unavoidable. I am dealing with a terrific thing. I am dealing with life as it is.

The problem of pain and suffering, with which this book is concerned, is prominent in the minds of men to-day. Unfortunately many only know it as presented by life's rebels—coloured with malice, twisted with cunning sophisms. It would seem to be the delight of certain writers to dangle the problem on the point of a vitriolic pen and hurl it at the heavens in defiance. These rebels offer no solution of the problem of pain and suffering. Instead, they sound the clarion of revolt.

They have no solution to offer.

There is a solution, however. It is offered in these pages.

AUTHOR.

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THE SHADOW ON THE EARTH

CHAPTER I

BROKEN

IT was a monastery on the lower slopes of the Alps. It was night. And it was a knocking on the outer door loud enough for the great awakening that roused the monks from their slumbers. One of them went down and opened it. Outside three men were standing, bearing a roughly-made stretcher on which a dark form lay.

"There's been an accident on the mountains," said one of the men. "May we bring him in?"

The monk led the way to the guest-room. The unconscious figure was laid on the bed.

"I will go and fetch Brother Anselm," said the monk, adding that Brother Anselm used to practise as a doctor. He left them. They stood staring gloomily towards the bed. One of them muttered his annoyance at finding the place was a monastery.

A few minutes, and Brother Anselm entered—an Englishman to their surprise. He looked at the three men—rather sharply at one of them; then went across to the bed. They explained how it had happened. He got to work and examined the battered body. He set a broken limb and bandaged some cuts. Next, leaving a monk in charge, he found food for the other three. Beds were prepared. No, said Brother Anselm, he would watch; they needed sleep.

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As he kept vigil he recalled the face of one of those three men—the face of a man he had once known.

In the morning he examined his patient again. And then he gave his verdict.

“ Yes, he will live ; but he will be crippled for life. The spine is injured.”

A second doctor was sent for from the town down in the valley. He gave the same verdict, adding that there might be a good deal of pain from time to time.

* * * * *

The day came when the sick man asked Brother Anselm how soon he would get up. When would his legs be right ?

Brother Anselm did not answer, but looked at him. He was thinking how young he was. His physique was splendid, his good looks unquestionable. The features, the way of the hair, the shape of the hands told of breeding. There was something very attractive about him, too, as he had already found.

“ When shall I get up ? ”

“ Would you rather I answered your question quite straight ? ” said the monk.

“ Why—er—yes, of course.”

“ You will never get up.”

The other stared.

“ *Never get up ?* What—what do you mean ? ”

“ You will be a cripple for life. Your spine is injured.”

There was a silence—a horrible silence. The young man turned white. He lay there thinking.

"Is that true?"

"Yes, it is true."

The meaning of it slowly came to him. The monk saw a gleam entering his eyes, and his fists clenching. The bed suddenly shook. . . .

"Curse it! . . . Curse God! . . ."

Brother Anselm did not stir.

"Yes—curse God! . . ."

Brother Anselm waited.

"I hate Him! He's smashed me up!" He choked it out, his voice shaking.

"God did not smash you up," said the monk.

"Oh, don't put me off!" The other glared at him.

"Why didn't He stop that blasted rope breaking? Why didn't He stop me from falling?"

"Why didn't He work a miracle? That's what you're asking."

"All right, then. Why didn't He?"

"Why should He? Is He under any obligation to work a miracle?"

"Yes, if He's any good. What's He for, if He's not for that?"

"He's not for interfering with His own laws, without good reason. After all, you take your own risk on the mountains."

"His laws have done for me, damn them!"

"You are not done for," said Brother Anselm.

"*Not done for?* I'm broken! I'm finished! My life's finished; everything's finished—finished. Do you hear? Do you understand? It's the end of everything."

"It is not."

"Not? Don't try and blind me. I—I don't want your apologies for the Almighty. I don't want your

religious talk: you needn't try it on me. I've done with religion. I never had much use for it. I've none at all now."

Brother Anselm waited, saying nothing.

"Don't stare at me! Can't you say something? Can't you do something? You people can't do anything when your religion's put to the test. Why don't you get your Almighty to put me right——"

He stopped. His ear had caught something. It was the monks singing their Office.

"Go and tell them to stop that row! Tell them to stop that fool's game! And, if He doesn't put me right, tell them to curse Him!"

Brother Anselm took up a book and began to read.

The other subsided into a sullen silence—broken by occasional mutterings. He began to think. He began to think deliberately, fiercely. He thought of all that life had meant to him; of his undergraduate days, of his games, his triumphs, of the cups standing on his mantelpiece at home. He saw them standing there now—in mockery. He saw the colours of the county he played for, hanging in his cupboard. His mind travelled to the stables: he was patting the silky neck of his favourite mount; swinging himself into the saddle. Then to the garage—his car. He was on the road—switching her on to the full; trees and hedges whistling by. Then his friends—his endless friends; bridge friends, tennis friends; those summer days on the courts—tea inside. He could hear the great Georgian house, his home, ringing with their laughter. He saw the sunny lawns in front sloping down to the cool of the trees and river. He was swimming in the clear depths, diving into them off the bank, shouting to the others stripping there, shouting for sheer joy of life.

Great nights in London flashed before him. The Pullman journeys up with that hunting crowd after the day's meet. Dinners, wild dinners—pelting one another with paper balls; mad pranks—men and women well champagned, flushed with the day's wind and drink. Afterwards the show—annoying the sedate stalls with their tomfooleries. Or the Savoy—the sensuous rhythm of the jazz band. Faces came back to him—faces of the women he had danced with, fooled with; faces of the women he had loved. Then Prince's for supper—and a night-of-it. . . .

Yes, that was life; gorgeous, full-blooded life! . . .

Suddenly he came back to realities—to what had happened. The horror of it returned—redoubled. Sweat broke out on his forehead. He tried to shift himself. Brother Anselm looked up to see him glaring in impotent frenzy.

“It's the end of everything! I'm in a trap! It's a living death! I'll go mad! . . . I'm not going to lie here. I'm going to get up——”

He struggled to rise, wriggling towards the edge of the bed. Brother Anselm went across quickly and held him down.

“Take your hands off!”

“I will not.”

“Take them off!”

“I will not.”

He lay there gasping.

“I will let go when you give me your word to lie quiet.”

“You damned bully!”

“You may damn me as much as you like. Are you going to keep quiet?”

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He yielded angrily.

"All right, you brute of a monk, I'll give in ; but I'll not forget this."

Brother Anselm let go. He went back to his chair and picked up his book again. The other lay still ; his lips trembling, his eyes closed.

Half an hour later he fell asleep, exhausted.

CHAPTER II

THE CRIPPLE AND THE ATHEIST

§ I

“**N**OW that you’re here,” said the Cripple, “I want to talk things out. I’m in the depths of depression. You realize my position, don’t you? I am done in. There’s nothing to look forward to, but lying on my back like a helpless log for the rest of my life. Cheerful prospect, isn’t it?”

The Atheist sat down by the bed. He had climbed up from the hotel in the town at the foot of the mountains, where the three of them had been staying since the night on which they had carried their burden into the monastery. He was the eldest of the party: the one whose face had recalled some memory to Brother Anselm. It was certainly a face that would not be forgotten easily. Its singularity lay not so much in the straight features, startlingly handsome though they were, or in the blackness of the eyes, but in the peculiar, cynical twist of the mouth. It was a clever face, revealing a powerful personality behind.

“I am sorry,” he replied. He passed a hand over his hair.

The Cripple began to tell him what the monk had said on the previous day: Brother Anselm had talked quietly to him later on. He was calmer now and could

speak collectedly. The Atheist listened. The cynical twist of his mouth became more marked.

"Oh yes," he said as the other came to an end, "but I am afraid this good monk's arguments sound somewhat unconvincing. These religious people have got to say all that. It's their profession—their job. Did his apologies for the Almighty convince *you*?"

"I scarcely listened. I didn't want that kind of stuff. It bores me stiff."

"I'm not surprised. Apologies of this nature are apt to be wearisome, and forced." There was a wariness in the tone, as if he were feeling his way. He crossed his legs.

"These people, you know, call their God a God of love." His manner was indifferent.

"So I believe," said the Cripple, equally indifferent. The Atheist went further:

"Can you seriously imagine a God of love creating a world like this—a world whose pains and horrors give the lie to anything suggesting love?"

The Cripple looked interested.

"I can't say I've ever thought much about it. Go on."

The Atheist moved forward his chair:

"Can you believe in a God Who is eternally silent to the cries of tortured humanity? Can you believe in a God Who looks down upon the world in cold aloofness, Who never shows Himself, Who never makes a sign? Can you really believe in a *good* God creating men and breaking them on the wheel of life—as He has broken you? If there were a day of judgement, it would be for man to appear at the bar not as a criminal, but as an accuser. If I were ever to believe that a God of love created this world, from

that moment I should consider myself insane."

The Cripple was roused now.

"What sort of God created it, then?"

"We've no reason to suppose it was created at all. It's always been going on."

"But how? Something must make it go on."

"Certainly; some sort of eternal energy—a blind force."

The Cripple pondered, staring at the wall opposite.

"Well," he said at last, "supposing there is no God; supposing I'm the victim of a blind force instead of a God; I don't see that I'm any better off than before. It doesn't put me right. It doesn't help me. Can't you see? I'm caught—pinned down! I can't escape! Oh hell! Can't you see, man?"

The Atheist hesitated. . . .

"You mean you want something to live for?"

"Y—es; if you can give me something."

"Listen. Live for Humanity. Put the idea of God away. The day is coming when men will no longer cringe before a God in a distant heaven and a future life: that idea has had its run. It is Man now—Humanity! Let Humanity be your God. The future is not in another world: it is here. There is a dazzling future ahead—on earth. Science, genius, all the powers of human reason are even now uniting in the only cause that matters, the future of mankind. Soon the whole world will be dominated by one sentiment, one idea—the reign of Man. Man, no longer crushed, but conquering; chaining the very forces of nature, casting out disease, riding down rough-shod all that is hideous and ugly. There is a heaven coming. It will be man's own creation: it will be this world transformed. The future lies with Man, not God."

"But I shan't be there," came testily from the other.

"No, but the memory of you will be—of your share in bringing it about."

"My share!" A bitter laugh broke from the Cripple. "Can you see me transforming the world on my back?"

"The world will be transformed by the spread of reason, the steady progress of reason; by the rooting up of false ideas, of mediæval superstitions; by teaching men to rely on themselves and not on an imaginary God, to concentrate solely on this world, on this life, not on an illusory future invented by priests—in a word, by spreading truth. Why not study the works of reason? You have a clear intellect; why not use it? You will have leisure. Even on your back you will have abundant opportunity of influencing others. Combat these false ideas. Why not further the cause of Humanity by——"

"Oh, hang Humanity! Excuse me being rude, but I haven't the slightest interest in it, or its future. Humanity can get on without my luminous intellect to enlighten it. Intellect? I'm not fool enough to be taken in by sop like that. Even if I could do what you suggest, even if I did share in bringing about this wonderful future, what good would it be to me? I shouldn't be there to enjoy it."

"You and your work would live on in your fellow-men," said the Atheist.

"And I am to spend my future non-existence in oblivion of that consolation? How very comforting! Thank you, but I am afraid the prospects of Humanity don't appeal to me on those terms."

The Cripple thought. Then he said:

"I don't wish to seem ungrateful, but—er, may I be quite candid?"

"Certainly. I'd rather you were. Remember, I have merely suggested *one* course."

"Well then. You give me, if possible, even less to live for than before. If there were a God and a future life there would be something to hang on to. You say there is not: you take *that* from me. You know too—forgive me being quite plain—you know quite well that, in your rationalistic scheme of things, I could never be anything but a burden to others—to Humanity. I am helpless, smashed up—useless. I am one of those *ugly* things you mentioned that ought to be got rid of; scrapped, thrown into the dust-bin. You know quite well that I—and all life's miscarriages—are on your list marked 'unfit for further use.'"

"Rather a bald way of putting it; but still if you feel——" The Atheist purposely left the sentence unfinished. The Cripple regarded him curiously for a moment, before he continued:

"You once spoke to me of your utilitarian ideas—eugenics for the human race: the unfit were to be weeded out; the old, the sickly and the *crippled* were to be offered, politely offered, euthanasia. It should be gently but firmly impressed upon them that they were clogging the activities of their fellow-beings, that they were in the way. I remember the very illustration you gave—a marching army hampered by its wounded. Life, you said, was essentially the vanquishing of the weak. The unfit must drop out, Humanity march on. And I agreed with you then, when—when I was wanted. I am one of your unwanted now——"

"And do you agree now?" cut in the Atheist. He had shown no sign of embarrassment. He was watching the Cripple intently.

"I don't know." The Cripple paused. "I don't know——" He looked up, to be met by a cold, calm stare. Suddenly a fury seized him, and for a moment he saw red. . . . He held himself in. Then he said deliberately and calculatingly :

"I don't know. But there is one thing I *do* know. I asked you for something to live for. You offer me—you don't say so, but it is what your ideas mean—you offer me the choice of burdening the world with my broken body or of getting out of the way. You offer me death for preference ; and after death extinction. You take away everything and you give—nothing. I asked you for something to live for : you offer me nothing—to die for."

The Atheist looked out of the window.

.

§ 2

There was an odd look in the Cripple's eyes. He had lain there very still, after the Atheist's footsteps had echoed his departure down the corridors of the quiet monastery, and died away. The evening had faded slowly into night, into the vast blue canopy stretched above the Alpine heights. There was silence in the night. There was silence in the heights, silence in the valleys, silence in the monastery, silence in his room.

A bell pealed into the deeps of it all—and into the Cripple's brain. He stirred uneasily, and then became aware of things—of the door opening. Brother Anselm stood before him. He felt himself being raised. A cup of something was placed on the bed-table. He began to drink, mechanically. Brother Anselm seemed to be watching him.

"Don't stand there looking at me !" he snapped

out. Brother Anselm sat down and began to say his Office. When, later, he was removing the empty cup, he said :

" You've something on your mind ; won't you tell me ? "

The attempt was greeted with a laugh—a bitter, sneering laugh. The Cripple lay still again, staring unseeingly at the wall.

" Good night," said Brother Anselm. The Cripple took no notice. There was a puff at each of the candles and then darkness.

. . . Suddenly he became alert. He listened. He heard the door shutting. He waited. . . .

Then slowly, painfully, he shifted his body to the side of the bed. His hand felt downwards, underneath. The knapsack was there. He tugged at it. It was on the bed, his fingers feeling for the straps. He tore at the canvas and plunged a hand inside. Yes, the case was there. He wrenched it out ; the knapsack fell with a thud. There was a little button. . . .

The lid was open. His fingers ran over the row of phials. It was the shortest one, he remembered—the one the chemist had warned him of. That—that was it ! He drew it out and held it up. Yes, that was it. He could see it silhouetted against the open window. . . . The moments went by. He was still holding the little phial—eyes staring into the blue silence without. Would it be more silent than that ? Was the Atheist right ? Would it be just—a blank ? Suddenly he felt afraid, horribly afraid. The terror of that nothingness gripped his whole being, and set the pulses drumming in his temples. The little bottle slipped from his fingers—now wet and shaking. He clutched wildly and recovered it.

Then slowly his will reasserted itself. He lay still. . . . The little silhouette appeared again—and fingers feeling for the cork. . . .

There was a swift movement somewhere in the room. Something—a hand—was gripping his wrist! He felt his fingers being unloosed, in a steady deliberate way that suffered no resistance. The bottle was released.

He fell back, stupid and dazed. There were more movements in the darkness. A match grated and flared. The candle-flame hesitated, grew, and revealed—Brother Anselm!

It was some ten minutes later. The Cripple was calmer; but the twitching of his lips betrayed the strain of the recent crisis. Brother Anselm had not spoken. He had merely flung the phial out of the window, picked up the knapsack, put the case inside, and then sat down and resumed saying his Office. . . .

“How did you know?”

The monk looked up.

“I saw it in your eyes.”

There was another pause.

“How did you get in?”

“I never went out.”

“You—you were here all the time?”

“I was.”

Brother Anselm laid his breviary on the table. “There are only three people who know what happened just now; you and I—and God. It is known only to those three. You understand?”

“Y—es,” said the Cripple, and then he added: “Thank you.”

Brother Anselm did not pick up his breviary again. He looked at the clock on the mantelpiece and then sat rather intent as if waiting for something. It came. Through the open window there floated, rising and swelling and sinking, the strong cadence of the monks' Office : *De profundis clamavi ad te . . .*

"Do you know what that means?"

The Cripple shook his head. Somehow he could not speak.

"From the depths I have cried to Thee."

The Cripple looked away, rather queerly, as if not wanting to be seen. His lips tightened—and quivered. A spasm shook him—a jerking, difficult spasm of sobs. And then the flood-gates of his soul gave way, and down the pallid cheeks there streamed an agony of tears. . . .

Brother Anselm was by the bed now, his hands on the pathetic heaving shoulders, a world of pity in his voice :

"Oh, my man . . . my poor man . . . my poor man. . . ."

CHAPTER III

THE MONASTERY GARDEN

IT was a week later.

The doctor had come up again from the town below and re-examined the Cripple. He and Brother Anselm had then held a consultation. It was decided that the patient might now be moved.

Brother Anselm was telling him. The Cripple, however, did not seem enthused with the idea.

"I was wondering," he said rather wistfully, "if I might be allowed to stay on for a bit."

"There would be no difficulty as far as *we* are concerned," replied Brother Anselm. "It is you I am considering. Don't you think you might be rather bored? We are a bit religious here, you know. Of course, if you feel you can stick it—"

"Can you stick *me*?"

A big brown hand was held out. The Cripple took it shyly, eagerly:

"I want to stay, if—if I'm not a burden."

Something in the answering grip told him that he would not be a burden here—not one of the unwanted. Brother Anselm stood looking at him for a moment and then turned away, and for no apparent reason began to examine the book-shelf. . . . He was blinking.

And so it came about that the Cripple stayed on.

It was now full summer. The icy wind from the Alps no longer whistled and screamed under the eaves of the monastery roof. Instead, the sun poured down invitingly. Through his window the Cripple could see the snows of the mountains glistening white to its blaze.

One day there arrived a kind of long chair on wheels—an ambulance. Next day the Cripple was lying in it, in the monastery garden. And there, from now onwards, it became his custom to spend the long summer hours.

It was very beautiful in the garden. Flowers of gorgeous colours and scents patterned great carpets of green. There were trees too, in clumps, for the wind's whisperings. From their shade he could see the grassy slopes giving way to fields, and the fields to the grey of the rocky valley, and, far away, the hazy plains of Italy. On either side there towered the great white Alps.

It was here one morning that Brother Anselm sat, reading to him. A gorgeous morning. Insects droned and buzzed in the quivering heat all round; the tune of some near-by stream tinkled its way over pebbles and rocks; there were birds on the wing and their songs in the sun. There was peace.

Brother Anselm became aware that he had lost his audience. He stopped reading. It brought the other back from his reverie.

"Sorry. I'm awfully rude. I was thinking about something."

Brother Anselm put down the book, and turned towards him. He noticed there was a difference in the Cripple's appearance. He was no longer unkempt.

He was shaved, and his hair was glistening and brushed well back. These matters had been neglected at first. His good looks were very apparent again.

"Er—may I talk to you about something?"

"Fire away."

The Cripple considered how to make a start.

"Well, first. You must have thought me an awful cad——"

"Cut it, man, cut it."

"No, but really——"

"That's all over. Next please."

"I say, it's beastly good of you to——"

"Shut up. Get on with it."

The Cripple gave up.

"Well—er, this is what I want to say. I've been having a sort of think—thinking things out; and I'm beginning to see that it's no good despairing and going mad. It seemed at first as if it was the end of everything. I suppose it is in one sense. I mean that other life, that hectic life, is over—finished. I still feel muddled and confused—uprooted. Things seemed so cruel, so horribly cruel——"

"I know," said Brother Anselm, "I know."

"——And yet life *can't* be altogether cruel. All this isn't cruel"—he indicated the garden—"it's amazingly beautiful. You're not cruel, you're——" The Cripple swallowed. "I mean there's a lot of goodness and beauty in the world: that's what I'm beginning to see. But why—this is what I *can't* see—why should there be so much ugliness, so much pain and suffering mixed up with it all? It seems one huge contradiction."

Brother Anselm gazed at the Alpine snows as if seeking an inspiration. He stood up and moved the Cripple's ambulance away from the green harbour

until the whole mountain-range lay bare before them, ridge upon ridge sweeping up into vast white stretches, steeping into peaks against the blue of heaven. He pointed :

" You see those dark patches of rock ? They bring out the whiteness of the snow, don't they ? They add to the beauty of the mountains. Don't you think, in the same way, that the ugly patches in the world, the dark patches of pain and suffering, might bring out the goodness of life—might add to its beauty ? "

The Cripple studied the mountains.

" Y—es, I see. Y—es."

" Is what has happened to you really an unmitigated disaster ? " said the monk. " Is it really a cruel horror ? Why shouldn't it add to your life, in some way ? It has cut you off from a great deal, yes, including that hectic life, as you call it ; from animal pleasures, from the inane futilities—the silly shams of a world that dares not think, that jazes along on its brainless round of shows and drinks and lusts : a lunatic's ' Dance of Death.' It has cut you off from all that. And it has left a void. Don't you think that possibly that void may be a good thing ? "

" How ? Why ? "

" Because voids can be filled."

Brother Anselm wheeled the ambulance back into the shade. The Cripple did not say anything. His eyes were still upon the mountains. . . .

" You tried to escape from life. You ran amok—went off the deep end, because you thought there was nothing left."

" You mean there is something more, something to fill the void ? How am I to fill it ? "

" That depends on yourself."

The Cripple saw that Brother Anselm meant it to be left at that. He returned to his former point :

“ Tell me, why should there be ugly things at all ? Why *should* there be pain and suffering ? It’s all such a mystery. Couldn’t things have been—managed better ? Couldn’t—— Hullo ! who——”

Brother Anselm looked up. A figure was coming towards them.

“ It’s ‘ The Optimist ’ ! ” said the Cripple.

CHAPTER IV

BROTHER ANSELM AND THE OPTIMIST

§ I

HE came striding across the grass—and a flower-bed—to where they were sitting in the shade. Brother Anselm knew him—the younger of the three who had carried the Cripple down to the monastery on that tragic night. “The Optimist” was the Cripple’s name for him.

“How are we? How are we?” this person exuberated in vibrant tones. “What air! What——”

“It’s all right,” said the Cripple to Brother Anselm. “He’s pumping up. It’s a habit.”

The Optimist was taking in deep breaths, signifying the same with alternate undulations of the chest and abdominal regions.

“Do stop those pneumatics! We are discussing big things. You’d better join in.” This from the Cripple again.

The exuberant one, having attained the right air-pressure, spread himself on the grass and surveyed the other two with an all-embracing smile. He was the embodiment of life and vigour, of physical energy—bristled with it from head to foot.

Brother Anselm had already found him an interesting person, with very strong views on life, very pugnacious over them and very anxious to air them. There had

been one or two friendly scraps between them before now. Untrammelled by what he called "the outworn dogmas of religion," his intellectual activities found play in such pastimes as Christian Science. The doctrines of Nietzsche shared his attentions. Also H. G. Wells. And he Couéed daily ; at cock-crow, morn and eventide. Snippets and tags culled from his heroes' somewhat divergent philosophies of life, and repeated at intervals, supplied fuel for the fervid aspirations of his soul. What he aspired to Brother Anselm could not quite make out. He called it "the realization of the divinity within," but became vague when asked to explain. As a reward for Nietzschean proclivities the Cripple had labelled him "The Magnificent Blond Beast." And he rather looked it sprawling there on the grass.

"You were talking. What's the argument?" he beamed at them.

"Put that last question again," said Brother Anselm to the Cripple.

"Why is there pain and suffering in the world? That's what I was asking," he replied.

The Optimist sprang like a terrier on a rat: "Suffering? Pain? No such things! Inventions! Illusions!"

"Don't bark," said the Cripple. "I knew you'd say that. Er—is this trouble of mine an illusion?"

"Ah, that's because you don't understand. If you understood the Divine Metaphysics of Christian Science you would realize that there is no such thing as matter. There is only Mind. The——"

"Excuse me interrupting," said Brother Anselm, "but, instead of Mrs. Eddy's generalizations, wouldn't it be better to answer the question? Is his accident and all the pain of it merely an illusion?"

" 'There is no pain in Truth, and no truth in pain.' " Mrs. Eddy's dictum came out pat. " As long as you think wrongly, you will think as you do about it. It's a matter of right thinking."

" I should have thought it was a matter of fact," answered the monk. " Suffering and pain are self-evident facts, unless we're all lunatics. Is it 'right thinking' to sweep aside the age-long experience of mankind, to deny what is confirmed by universal consent? If Christian Science is true, then the human race is a race of imbeciles. Right thinking? If Christian Science were right, human reason could never be trusted again. Who is Mrs. Eddy to turn up in the nineteenth century A.D. with no credentials beyond a presumptuous claim to a special revelation and a marked ability for writing jargon? Who is she to pit herself against the common sense of humanity? "

The onslaught was unexpected. The Optimist steadied himself with more " pneumatics," seeking for a suitable tag.

" Pop-guns out of action! Get your heavies on him! " encouraged the Cripple.

The tag would not come. The text-books did not provide for this. Finally he tried to manœuvre the corner with: " Don't forget there are thousands of Christian Scientists."

" Yes," said Brother Anselm. " And why? Because there are thousands for whom Christian Science provides a nice easy platform for sliding off from Christianity into paganism, and because there are thousands who won't have pain and suffering."

The Optimist saw an opening: " And you insist on pain and suffering, you Catholics; and in doing so you land yourselves in a very nice dilemma. If there

are these physical evils, then there are defects in the world. I'd very much like to know how the infinitely perfect God you claim could create a world with defects in it ? ”

“ That's a heavy,” muttered the Cripple. He was all ears now. This was his own question, in another form.

“ God could create any world He chose,” the monk smiled back, “ with or without defects. If He couldn't He wouldn't be God. God can do anything He chooses. You can't limit the Creator to a particular creation. God is infinite—unlimited. Actually He has created a world *with* defects in it ; but these defects do *not* argue against His infinite perfection.”

“ What ? A God of goodness and a world of pain ? ”

“ Certainly. There is no contradiction. Pain and suffering are defects, permitted by God, yes ; but defects in a relative sense only—I mean relative to physical well-being. They are not strictly evils, but the natural accompaniment of sentient life. Why shouldn't God create beings liable to pain and suffering—provided, of course, that His eternal purposes are served by doing so ? ”

“ Oh, I don't know anything about ‘ His eternal purposes.’ ” The Optimist sounded impatient.

“ Exactly. And therefore you are scarcely in a position to judge. If the end of man's creation were merely material comfort and prosperity, than I admit it would be extremely difficult to reconcile pain with perfect Goodness. The humanitarian world of to-day places its chief good in material well-being and is up against God because pain and suffering are in its way—the folly of the thwarted child that sulks. But supposing pain and suffering minister to man's great end ;

supposing by their very means that end if most perfectly realized—supposing that to be so—then the goodness of God is not in question.”

“The great end!” exclaimed the Optimist, ignoring Brother Anselm. He stood up and walked about. His eyes were shining. “The great end! Yes! To attain it pain and suffering must be despised—laughed at, denied! The very notion of them is fatal to man’s end. Real or unreal, I would shout from the house-tops: ‘Down with pain! Down with disease! Trample them under! Cast them out! Barnacles on the bark of humanity!’ How can they minister to the great end of man? The end? Man’s end is Superman——”

“Keep off the flower-bed!” from the Cripple.

“——Efficiency! The will-to-power! Defiance! Those are the ministers to man’s end. Disease, weakness, pain, these things—I mean these illusions—hang round man’s neck like a curse. The unfit—I mean those who think they are—must sacrifice themselves to the earth that one day it may bring forth Supermen. Damaged goods are an encumbrance to humanity. I’ve no use for Christianity and its sympathy with these horrors—imaginary horrors. It counteracts the law of natural selection—the survival of the fittest. It preserves instead of weeding-out. It hinders, shackles man’s whole being, as men will come to see. Man will march on, over the strewn wreckage of dogmas and creeds, to the grandeur of his godhood, to the realization of the divinity within, to the perfect expression of eternal consciousness, to the perfection of himself—which is God! Yes, to his godhood! The earth for the gods—the gods that shall be! . . .”

The outburst was dramatic, but apparently sincere.

"High Velocity!" from the ambulance.

Brother Anselm turned to the Cripple: "Were you with the gunners in the War?"

"I was, yes."

The monk picked a blade of grass and began to suck it.

§ 2

A sense of annoyance pervaded the Optimist, marring the triumph of the moment. Brother Anselm seemed unaffected by the peroration; not even impressed. He suddenly felt young. There was an embarrassing wait. The monk went on sucking the blade of grass. . . .

"Well?" from the Optimist—distinctly piqued.

"Well what?" from Brother Anselm.

"What!—yes, what?"

The monk laughed, but quite good-naturedly. "I'm trying a delay-fuse," he said. "I want you to calm down and listen. May I first remark that the last part of your utterance means nothing to me. And it means nothing to *you*—the 'godhood' and 'divinity' part. These flamboyant expressions mean nothing even to the humanitarians who coin them. They mean no more than the 'Goodness, Beauty and Truth' of the Modernists. It is all so much verbiage, camouflaging the denial of a Personal God and blinding men to their final end——"

"You're evading me," interrupted the other.

"I am not. I'm doing a preliminary canter to clear the ground. Do let's understand what we're talking about. When I speak of man's end, I mean his final end in God his Creator, in Heaven; not an imaginary end in himself here on earth, as pictured by

you. That in a moment though. May I make another remark on what you said ? ”

“ By all means.” Coldly polite.

“ Very well. In your ‘ gods ’ and ‘ supermen ’ I seem to recognize snatches of Nietzsche and H. G. Wells. I fancy your dislike of Christianity is borrowed too. I am going to be appallingly rude—but have you ever thought out what you have just said ? No, you have not. There is no thought behind it. It is quite easy, as many prove to-day, to rattle off the crude notions of impertinent critics who imagine they can run this world very much better than its Creator. . . . Do you mind sitting down ?—Thank you. . . . The humanitarian scheme sounds magnificent on paper, or in the air. In real life this weeding out of the unfit would mean a ceaseless campaign of murder—in Wellsian language ‘ a certain deliberate elimination ’—until a few magnificent monsters were left, devils of selfishness, ruthless unpitying beasts. And they, in their time, might well turn and rend each other, cursing their impotence to find immunity from disease. No. On humanity’s brow is written large—‘ Disease and suffering and pain.’ Shall man delete that writing ? ”

The Optimist was experiencing a sense of deflation. He ejected : “ But—but——” and stuck.

“ Forgive me if I’ve been too straight,” said Brother Anselm. “ Now, here’s my real contribution. Granted man’s final end as intended by God—that means seeing and possessing God in heaven, and in consequence enjoying eternal happiness, happiness beyond all human imagination—granting that, then a very different light is thrown on pain and suffering. We then see them as constant reminders that man’s final

aim and happiness lie beyond this world, that he must suffer and endure, that he may not snatch the victory unearned. We see them as rungs in the ladder of life for the scaling of heroic heights. We see this world as a vast crucible into which men are plunged for their testing—for Eternal Life. For those who shirk the test the world becomes a cauldron ; for those who face it—a crucible of Love."

Brother Anselm leant over the Cripple :

" Do you understand ? "

The pale face lit :

" Yes, the crucible ! I—I like that."

" Now," said Brother Anselm to the Optimist, " I want two minutes' private conversation, strictly private, with this—perambulator. I've got something to tell him. Do you think you could sort of run about the garden ? "

The Optimist said most certainly he would " take exercise," and walked off, head in the air. Really, this monk was insufferable ! Was he a schoolboy ?—Damn the flower-bed !—He must collect his thoughts. All that religious stuff, a fool could answer it. Two minutes' private conversation ! Bah ! Two minutes to put him off ! He paced up and down at a distance. . . . Yes, infernally rude of the monk—jabbering away there as if he didn't exist. That chap Inge was right—a Roman priest could never be a gentleman. More pacing. . . . Two minutes ! Twenty more like ! Still more pacing. . . . Suddenly there was a crash, and the next moment he was hopping about on one leg. He had failed to notice a garden-barrow left on the path. His expletives were interrupted by a shout from the Cripple : " Don't worry, old man, don't worry ! It's only an illusion ! "

The Optimist looked daggers . . . and then burst out laughing. His ill-humour had gone.

"Come here," called the Cripple. "I want to say something to you."

The Optimist limped back, somewhat puzzled.

"First," said the Cripple, "put your hand there."

He did so, wondering what this was about.

"Brother Anselm has just been telling me."

"Telling you what?"

"It was you who climbed down and got me up—that night on the mountains."

The Optimist coloured like a boy.

"And you never told me," said the Cripple.

The other stuttered something about it being the sort of thing any fellow would do.

"Not everybody," said Brother Anselm. "Yes, I've found out all about it. You let yourself down into that crevasse; and you knew you might never get back, even by yourself—let alone with the weight of his body. You knew that well enough, and yet you did it. And you only got him back after a struggle that must have been a long hell of torture."

"Put it there again," said the Cripple. The Optimist did so. "You're a brick. You're——"

"That's all right."

The Cripple stammered and became hopelessly mixed—and the Optimist more embarrassed.

"I—I shouldn't be here, if you hadn't done it."

"Damned glad I did it then."

The Optimist was getting redder still. Brother Anselm relieved matters by leading him away. He looked him in the eyes: "I want to thank you myself, for giving me a very dear person to look after."

The Optimist could only blurt out: "It's—it's

awfully decent of you to be so gen—generous. Sorry I was so beastly rude just now about your—religion.”

“ And I’m sorry if I was hard on you. But it wasn’t really you I was being hard on : it was those lies—those devil’s lies that fool men off the track. I was hard on them because of my respect for you ; because I don’t want to see a man, like the man you are, being gulled——”

“ Look here, you two,” interjected the Cripple, “ I’ve got a question to ask. Sit down, Magnificence, and answer this.”

Magnificence obeyed.

“ May I annoy you ? ”

“ Rather ! ” replied the Optimist.

“ Then tell me. If you really believe, as you said, that the unfit must go, why in the name of Heaven did you save me ? You must have known something even then, when you looked down—when you saw my body on that ledge : you must have known that, even if you got me up alive, you would only be salving a bit of wreckage. If you really believe all you said just now, you ought to have left me there—damaged goods, an encumbrance to humanity. You did *not* leave me there. . . . Why ? ”

There was no answer.

Brother Anselm looked at the Optimist. The Optimist looked at the grass. A bird hopped up, put its head on one side, and hopped off. Brother Anselm looked at the Cripple. The Cripple looked at Brother Anselm. Then they both looked at the Optimist—licking his lips. A clock in the monastery tower wheezed, struck, and saved the situation. The Optimist murmured something about getting back to the hotel. Brother Anselm stood up. . . .

"But——" the Cripple began.

"No, don't," the monk stopped him.

The Optimist looked gratefully at Brother Anselm.

Five minutes later he was swinging his way across the fields. "Good sort that monk," he muttered.

"If ever I meet that chap Inge . . ."

CHAPTER V

A CRY FROM THE DEPTHS

"**I** CAN'T see that it would do him much good : it would only remind him of things."

This was the Optimist's opinion. The three of them were discussing the Cripple in a corner of the lounge. The Atheist had suggested bringing him down from the monastery to spend a few days at the hotel.

"It would be a change," he argued. "It's very slow for him up at the monastery."

"He seemed cheerful enough yesterday : you'd hardly think he'd been smashed up."

The third man—"The Pessimist," as the Cripple called him—growled something about it not making much difference either way : things were about as bad as they could be in any case. . . .

In the end the Atheist prevailed. He seemed quite determined. He would pay all expenses himself.

Later in the day the Cripple received a note, sent up from the hotel. He recognized the Atheist's handwriting, opened and read it through, and then gave it to Brother Anselm.

"What do you think?"

The monk scanned the contents, folded it slowly and returned it.

"There would be no difficulty about getting you down there in the car, as he suggests; and it would certainly be a change. All the same, I don't think you would be any the happier for it."

"Why? Where's the harm?"

"There's no harm in staying at the hotel. I don't mean that."

"What do you mean then? Why don't you like the idea?" There was rather an impatient note in his voice.

"I'd rather not say. I must leave it to you to guess. I'd sooner you decided for yourself, too."

The Cripple considered for a moment and then said: "Oh well, a few days! I can't very well go to the bow-wows now. I'll risk it." He laughed: the scheme was rather attractive.

The car arrived at the monastery the following afternoon. The stretcher part of the ambulance, with the Cripple on it, was lifted in by one of the monks and "The Pessimist," who had promised to superintend the transference—"the transit of Venus" the Cripple called it, excited as a boy off for the holidays. As they drove off he called "Cheerio!" to Brother Anselm, who stood there watching until a bend in the road hid the car from sight.

The monk walked back slowly, wondering whether it had been wise to let him go so easily. He could not prevent him of course. And after all he was not sure. . . . But why was that man so bent on having him at the hotel? Why had that near thing happened on the night of his visit to the monastery—the thing that had so nearly ended it all? Once more certain memories of the past dinned in his brain.

... Was that man still doing his devil's work? He felt uneasy.

.

It was the Optimist. Brother Anselm, looking up from his digging, recognized the swinging stride. He left his spade standing against the wall and went to meet him. Almost before the monk had taken his hand the other was saying—"I hope you won't think me a fool; but I'm a bit worried. I don't like—what's going on down there. It's not doing him any good. That's why I've come up."

"Tell me," said the monk.

The other jerked out his account. It was what the Atheist was doing that troubled him. Brother Anselm's face grew grave as he listened.

"You may tell your friend——"

"He's not really my friend," said the Optimist. "He came with us because he's good at mountains, that's all."

"You may tell your *acquaintance* that, unless he sends him back to the monastery within three hours from now, I shall be down at the hotel an hour later to fetch him back myself."

Within the scheduled time the car was at the monastery gates.

It was Brother Anselm himself now who helped lift the Cripple back on to the ambulance—after taking a note handed him by the driver. The car drove off and he wheeled a silent figure back through the grounds into the garden, asking another monk on the way to bring tea for two. Ensnconced in the

arbour Brother Anselm opened the note. It contained two lines and was signed by the Atheist.

"Sir—your 'request' is granted. Our mutual friend has benefited by the change—as you will doubtless discover."

Brother Anselm tore the note carefully into small pieces and dropped them on a heap of weeds. Tea arrived. The Cripple consumed it disinterestedly—saying nothing. He had not spoken yet. The monk decided to wait, and busied himself about the garden.

"I wish to hell you'd stop messing about with that rake," suddenly came from the arbour. "I might be a darned corpse for all the attention I get."

Brother Anselm went on with his work.

"Getting me back to this hole——"

Brother Anselm walked across the lawn. . . .

"As regards your first remark—would you kindly keep a civil tongue in your head. As regards the second—you are quite free to return to the hotel. Would you like me to send for the car? I think perhaps I had better." And he went off towards the monastery. . . .

"No, stop! I——"

Brother Anselm walked on. . . .

"No, do stop! I——"

Brother Anselm walked on. . . .

"Oh, I'm sorry—I'm awfully sorry—I'm a cad."

Brother Anselm turned round and came back.

"Will you forgive me? I am very sorry. I didn't mean it. I'm in hell again. . . . Oh, keep me here! For pity's sake keep me here! I've only you—or despair."

The monk sat down close to the Cripple. Yes, those

few days had done their work. He set himself to battle for that soul again.

"Tell me all about it."

The whole miserable story came out. The Atheist had looked after the Cripple himself: everything in the way of comfort and ease was supplied. He was kindness itself; insisted on the Cripple seeing the life of the hotel to the full. He would wheel him to the tennis-courts in the afternoon. There was dancing in the ball-room every evening. The Cripple's ambulance would be placed in an alcove so that he could lie there listening to the seductive strains of the music, watching the couples glide by. At first it was rather diverting. He almost enjoyed it; until one night some girl's remark caught his ear—"Poor devil! I'd prefer a coffin—to that."

The words went home like a knife.

"Oh, he must have meant it all kindly; but it drove me mad. I was out of it all—cut off from everything."

"I know, I know, dear man," said Brother Anselm; "but it wasn't only that. You were beginning to face the loss of what you called 'that hectic life.' There was more. Tell me."

The Cripple hesitated.

"There was more, yes; but—oh, I hope you won't think me—disloyal. I told him all you had said—the crucible and all that. He sort of made me. He's got a way of making you tell him things. And then he reasoned. He went on and on, two or three days of it, until the crucible idea looked silly. He said it was one more method of apologising for what he calls 'the ever-absent God.' It all seemed so convincing—horribly convincing. And—and everything went—God and all. He left——"

"He left you, as he left you the evening he came here—in despair," Brother Anselm completed the sentence. "Man, can't you see? He sent you back again to-day, in despair. He didn't mind sending you back; his work was done—so he thought."

"His work? What work?"

"The work of robbing you of God. Do you imagine he got you down there to give you a good time? He got you there to destroy the hope that was growing in you. You were beginning to turn towards God. He hates God; hates religion. His one passion in life, his one satisfaction, is to rob men of both. That is his life-work."

"But how—how do you know?"

Brother Anselm's reply did not come very readily.

"Because this is not the first time that man and I have met. Last time was years ago, and under very different circumstances. He has forgotten me. I would rather not say more, except that I have not forgotten him."

The Cripple was puzzled, but did not press him further.

"Now," said the monk, "I want you to answer me. Were you happy that day here in the garden when I spoke about the crucible, and God?"

"Yes, I was."

"Why?"

"Because—well, I felt that if I plunged into the crucible, I mean, if I took what has happened to me in your way, I should find God. The very thought of it seemed to make me happy."

"That's number one," said Brother Anselm. "Now, number two. Were you happy when that man had finished with you?"

"No, I was in utter, hopeless misery."

"Why?" The monk leant forward. "Think, man, think!"

The Cripple met his eyes.

"Because—well, I felt as if I'd lost——"

There was a pause.

"Oh——"

The light of a great understanding dawned:

"Oh, my God! I want you . . . I want you. . . ."

CHAPTER VI

THE VILLAGE IN THE MOUNTAINS

IT was Brother Anselm's idea. He proposed it at breakfast, the Cripple munching toast. He was due at a village up in the mountains that afternoon. Would the other like to come, too? There was a view he wanted him to see. There was something else he wanted him to see as well. He would send for a car.

The Cripple said he was "all on." He looked amazingly happy, after the crisis of the previous day. At night, when the monk had lifted him into bed, he had ventured rather shyly:

"I suppose I ought to start saying some prayers. I haven't done it since I was a kid. What exactly does one do?"

"Talk to God in your own way."

"But I'm such a rotten blackguard."

"Tell Him that for a start," Brother Anselm had replied.

They set off soon after the midday meal, the stretcher part of the ambulance, with the Cripple inside, and the rest of it on the back of the car. "Looks like a travelling circus," he observed.

The road wound its way up and up through the rocky passes, the car climbing slowly—Brother Anselm's order; the Cripple was not to be jolted. From his

stretcher he watched the pageantry of nature passing by, strangely and newly alive to the beauty of it all; great phalanxes of pines patching the road with shadows of purple grey; sudden vistas through the clefts of giant cliffs. Or the way would open out into a basin in the mountains, meadowed and radiant with Alpine flowers of every hue smiling their thanks to the sun that brought them forth. Here, too, the oxen grazed, white and sleek and solemn-eyed, ringing with the music of their bells—that sound of sounds, the haunting melody of the mountains.

They mounted steadily, the air growing keener every mile, and at length the village was gained. It was the highest on the Italian side of the Alps. The car drove up to the entrance of a caffè. The Cripple was again placed on his ambulance, and Brother Anselm straightway proceeded to wheel him off down the street.

“What’s this? Sort of trot round?”

“You wait,” said the monk.

The Cripple noticed a church ahead and people standing about. The children among them saw Brother Anselm coming, waved and rushed to meet him. They kissed his hand reverently one by one and then, clinging to his habit and trotting alongside, began buzzing questions all together. Who was the signore? Why was he in bed like that? Was he *Inglese*?

Brother Anselm told them—and why he lay like that. The Cripple knew enough Italian to follow some of what was said. The rest he guessed; for a hush had fallen on the children. One little girl ventured to his side and studied him—big-eyed and open-mouthed. She announced that he had “beautiful fair hair” and told him her name was Innocente.

Then she stroked his hand with her own little brown one and asked him when he would get better. . . .

"Would you like to be inside the church while I am giving Benediction?" Brother Anselm saved him.

"Rather!" said the Cripple, wondering what "Benediction" was.

They were in front of the church now. A man, a rough peasant, came forward hat in hand from the greeting crowd. Would the *Prete* let him take charge? It appeared that he was the father of Innocente. He wheeled the ambulance through the open door inside and stationed the Cripple at the back facing the altar. Brother Anselm departed to the sacristy.

The Cripple looked about, in a state of amazement. The whole village was here, the great church filled from end to end; men, women and children all silent on their knees, or sitting meditatively. Dogs lay about, curled up in content. One, a late-comer, proceeded to establish itself beneath the ambulance. There was a baby close by, rolling about on the floor in an endeavour to stand on its head. An unsuccessful effort landed it by one of his wheels. The baby gurgled with glee at the find, clutched at the spokes and began a new series of acrobatics. At the altar two small boys in red were lighting endless candles, the twinkling flames shedding a golden glory down the nave.

Benediction began. The Cripple watched. That must be Brother Anselm, the priest far off at the altar. He was wearing some curious clothes. He was placing something high up amongst the candles. . . . The peasants sang. How they sang! The sonorous chant swung and swayed up and down, on and on. They seemed to be all looking at the candles. Was it the candles? No, they were looking at what Brother

Anselm had placed there. He wondered what it was.

What *could* it be? It was as if they were looking at *somebody*: there was love burning in their eyes. . . .

Suddenly his intuition told him that God was present to these people!

"The ever-absent God"—the Atheist's sneer came back. Absent? But He was here. He was with them. The very way they knelt told him that; their very attitude, their intense awareness. They couldn't be like that with a God Who was absent. This was Someone they knew to be intimately present, Someone they were talking to.

A bell sounded. There was a hush. They were all bowing their heads. Brother Anselm had turned round—holding Something in his hands. . . . The Cripple remembered that he was a "rotten blackguard." Brother Anselm had said— Yes, he would do so. . . .

It was quite a procession that trooped back with the ambulance to the caffè. A tiny boy, all braces and breeches, insisted on pulling in front. The little girl, Innocente, secured the Cripple's hand.

"Cut you out this time!" he called back at Brother Anselm.

Revenge came swiftly. The monk whispered something in the little girl's ear. She hesitated coyly for a moment, finger in mouth. The ambulance stopped. Then she stood on tip toe and gave the Cripple—a resounding kiss on the cheek!

"When you two have finished billing and cooing," said Brother Anselm to the blushing victim, "we're going to have coffee-and-cakes."

Addios were waved, and the ambulance passed into the caffè garden.

CHAPTER VII

BROTHER ANSELM AND THE PESSIMIST

§ I

"**W**HEW!" gasped the Cripple.

Brother Anselm had wheeled him to the garden terrace behind the caffè, a grassy plateau fronted by a low stone parapet over which they were now peering down into the depths beneath. The wall of rock, on which they were literally perched in mid-air, ran down some thousand feet sheer into a black gulf of pine-tops. Over their needle-points birds wheeled in dizzy circles. Beyond and below again the grey-green stretches emerging from the dark of the pinery ran down and down, sloping away to the far-off plains of Italy. Here and there the eye could pick out the white thread of the winding road. Flanking the expanses of the valley and soaring up into the white of their snows the Alpine monsters stood—cold and calm and strong, mighty sentinels keeping guard of the plains below.

And over all the blue of heaven swelled, and slowly swooped, and melted in the distant haze.

The Cripple gazed upon the vastness of it all.

The arrival of coffee and cakes broke the spell. One of the little tables which stood about was placed at

his side. Brother Anselm did host and poured out the coffee.

"Shall we ask your friend to join us?"

"What friend?" said the Cripple.

Brother Anselm pointed with his coffee cup to a melancholy figure sitting at the other end of the terrace. The Cripple looked and recognized—the Pessimist!

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "So it is! He's come up here to be miserable. Yes, let's ask him. But he's not exactly cheerful, you know. He's got extraordinary views, too."

Brother Anselm went across, exchanged the usual courtesies, and returned with the Pessimist, who was evincing mild surprise at their presence.

"I've just been apologizing for you," said the Cripple. The Pessimist attempted a smile. He was wondering whether any reference would be made to the other's abrupt return from the hotel: he had not seen him since and was puzzled by his cheerfulness. He was inwardly relieved when no mention was made of the matter, and proceeded to lapse into his wonted gloomy silence.

"When's the funeral?" grinned the Cripple. "Don't look like that; you'll spoil the landscape. How does that view strike you? Expand on it; don't keep it all to yourself."

"I've no small talk," said the Pessimist discouragingly.

"Well, unburden your soul. Give us your depressions of life."

"Don't take any notice of him," interposed Brother Anselm. "He's light-headed. He's in love. I'll get a muzzle for him."

The monk was wondering how best to draw out this

gloomy being. He knew something already of the man's 'depressions' of life. He determined to discover more of them if he could. He ventured :

" 'The Optimist' gave us his views on life the other day. I would very much like to know yours. I should be genuinely interested to hear them. Tell me what you think of the view ; and then tell me what you think of life."

" Yes," said the Cripple, " let's be miserable."

" If you wish," replied the Pessimist to Brother Anselm's request. " I never waste words on inane insincerities, and I shall not do so now. I look upon that view as I look upon all that is beautiful ; I look upon it as a mockery—a mockery of the hideousness of life."

Even Brother Anselm was startled at the abrupt declaration.

" If life is hideous then beauty is mere mockery, I agree. But why hideous ? "

" Because it is one long torture of unfulfilled hopes. At its best the world is a fool's paradise ; at its worst a slough of despond. You ask me what I think of life. I think life is one huge failure. I am frankly a pessimist. The end of all our efforts is to find happiness. Do we ever find it ? We strive and strive, and are baffled at every turn. The conditions of human existence are such that I can see no possibility of life being other than it ever has been—a veritable martyrdom of man."

" You refer," said the monk, " to what are commonly called physical and moral evils ? You mean these evils are so overwhelming as to render man's lot more or less unbearable ? "

" Just so. I would go even further. I would say

that the dominant quality in life *is* evil. I would say that existence itself is evil ; that existence is a thing to be abolished."

" Why don't you take poison ? " asked the Cripple.

" Because," proceeded the Pessimist, without a vestige of humour, " there is an even worse evil than existence, and that is the will-to-live. My existence affords me the opportunity of inducing my fellow-beings *not* to will to live."

" And supposing the whole human race wills not to live ? " Brother Anselm pressed him.

" When it does, then the day will have come to which we pessimists look forward, the day when the human race will cease to propagate itself, and die out."

" To the Day ! " The Cripple raised his coffee-cup.

Brother Anselm studied the gloomy being before him. He understood that he was expected to take all this seriously. He asked :

" How many people are there who think as you do ? I know Schopenhauer and Hartmann proclaimed pessimism as a philosophical theory, but it was not a very successful venture, was it ? You could scarcely say it caught on."

" I admit that there are, alas, very few genuine pessimists."

" Have you ever thought why ? "

" I imagine because most people prefer their fool's paradise."

" Hardly," said the monk. " The human race could not everlastingly fool itself. If happiness *were* unattainable men would cease to seek it. Why should they so persistently pursue happiness ? Don't you think the very search points to its existence somewhere, to its attainment somehow ? "

"I don't see that it points to more than the fact that most men are fools."

"It points to very much more, if your theory is true. If this perpetual quest for happiness is the fool's errand you make of it, then men are worse than fools. They are mad. For it means that human beings have acted irrationally throughout their whole history in a matter vitally concerning their well-being. No, you must reduce your scheme of thinking to its logical conclusion—the perpetual insanity of the human race."

"Call it that, if you like," said the Pessimist. His theories were being pressed further than he cared.

"Right! Then the essential sanity of the human race, which is an axiom of philosophy, is to go; the only sane people are pessimists; and the world is a lunatic asylum—with pessimists for the keepers. Would you subscribe to that?"

The other saw the quandary. . . .

"Hang on, Gloomy, hang on!" goaded the Cripple.

Brother Anselm spared an answer. "May I make one or two remarks about your ideas themselves?"

"Certainly." There was a suggestion of relief.

"Well then, may I suggest that you pessimists are suffering from an obsession—the obsession that evil is the all-pervading thing in this world. It is not. There is just as much, if not more, good than evil. You are so obsessed by your exaggerated notion of evil that you cannot see the good. All the pain and suffering and disease, all the physical evils in the world cannot obliterate the natural happiness inherent in life. Life spells happiness as well as pain. There is health and vigour as well as disease and corruption. There is joy as well as suffering—the mother's joy, the lover's joy, the joys of married love. The very

senses of the human body convey innumerable delights—the scent of flowers, the melodies of music, the loveliness of nature, the feel of wind and sunshine. The very intellect of man is a reservoir of gladness. The artist delights to create, the scholar to learn, the scientist to discover. Turn where you will you cannot fail to find happiness of life, as well as pain.”

“I cannot deny that,” said the Pessimist. “I admit that there is a transitory happiness which men squeeze out of life. But how long does it last? The joys you mention are but coloured bubbles. When grasped they burst—and life once more is emptiness.”

“True—of worldly happiness,” the monk replied. “The things of earth perish: they cannot permanently satisfy. But why should that make men despair? Why shouldn’t it be a stern reminder that permanent happiness lies elsewhere? You pessimists demand of this world what it can never give; what it was never meant to give. When your demand is refused you find refuge in despair, and turn upon life. In other words you—sulk.”

The other retorted hotly: “If there were a guarantee of permanent happiness somewhere, then there would be no cause for complaint!”

“If there were a guarantee!” exclaimed Brother Anselm. “Look here, you and your co-pessimists are not so blind as all that. You know well enough that there is such a thing in this world as the Catholic Church. You can’t overlook her; she’s too big, too unique. You *must* know that she guarantees the very thing you ask of life, the very thing you blame the world for refusing. But have you so much as glanced at her guarantee? Have you even examined her claims? She comes open-handed; she shows her

credentials. For two thousand years her millions have satisfied themselves that she can do what she promises—lead them to full unending happiness. Until you take the trouble to inquire of her, your complaint is a sheer pretence. I'm sorry, but you brought this on yourself. I simply couldn't let your remark pass."

"Pretence?" The Pessimist looked hurt.

"Yes, *pretence*. I use the word deliberately. I want you to see the insincerity, conscious or unconscious, of the pessimistic attitude. It is insincere to ignore the Catholic Church when she offers the very thing you ask for. It suggests that pessimism is a mere posture. When you can come to me and say: 'There is no guarantee of any final happiness. The Catholic Church lies. I have proved her claims false, her promises a hoax'—if ever you come and look me in the face and say that, then I will say to you: 'You may go now in all sincerity—and wallow in your slough of despond.'"

§ 2

In so far as the Pessimist enjoyed anything at all, he enjoyed a discussion—provided it was confined to vague generalities. But Brother Anselm would not allow any vagueness. His direct method of driving home concrete facts and realities was decidedly disconcerting. Brother Anselm had a way, too, of looking *into* you while he did it. You found yourself penetrated by a pair of deep-set grey eyes—compelling you to be perfectly honest with him, and with yourself. He had flung a challenge; and the Pessimist knew it for a fair challenge. The Catholic Church gave the lie to pessimism. Her assertions could not be swept aside

as beneath consideration. She was too potent a factor in the lives of men for that. He knew enough of her to know that she did make life worth living for her millions. She not merely said a thing: she did it. She sent her thousands daily into eternity radiant with hope. "Existence is a thing to be abolished!" His declamation suddenly sounded hollow and melodramatic. He was glad the monk had ignored it. . . .

"Your Despondency ruminates." The Cripple broke in upon these considerations.

"I am unwillingly admitting to myself that Brother Anselm's challenge is a fair one," replied the Pessimist. "I am going to put an equally fair one to him—a sort of counter-challenge."

He turned to the monk.

"You admit there is a vast amount of pain and suffering and evil in the world; physical and moral evils you called them. And, according to you, God is the cause of all things. He is therefore the cause of these evils. Would you then tell me why you call Him a *good* God?"

Brother Anselm picked up the glove without hesitation.

"There is no question, in any case, of God not being good. If God were not good there would be no such thing as goodness in the world—goodness can only come from God: there's nothing else for it to come from. Also, if God were not good, He wouldn't *be* God. God is Infinite Being, and must therefore contain within Himself all the perfections of being in an infinite degree. If there is goodness in creatures, as I imagine even you would admit, then there must be infinite goodness in God. He must be infinitely good."

"But that's metaphysics!" exclaimed the Pessimist, alarmed.

"Of course it's metaphysics. Why not? Metaphysics is the science for putting your mind right on these matters, just as physics are the right thing for putting your liver right. Most of the wrong thinking of to-day is due to neglect of metaphysics. However, that's by the way——"

"And it doesn't answer my challenge."

"Give me a chance," smiled the monk. "I want to answer your points in the right order. Now comes your question of God being the cause of all things, including evil. My answer is—evil is not a thing."

"Not a thing! What do you mean?"

"It is not a thing in itself."

Brother Anselm suddenly stood up. He proceeded to place his big figure between the line of the sun and the Pessimist, so that his shadow fell on him.

"Now, look. Is my shadow——"

"Watch him, Gloomy. It's all done by kindness"—from the ambulance.

"——Is my shadow, in which you are sitting, a thing in itself?"

The Pessimist looked perplexed.

"I must confess I'm in the dark."

"Because I'm in the light," said Brother Anselm. "I am an obstacle in the way of the sun. You are sitting in an absence of sunlight, called a shadow. The shadow is not a thing in itself. It is an absence of light."

The monk sat down. Applause from the Cripple.

"Got it, Gloomy? See if you can do it!"

"You'll be smacked and taken home in the pram," said Brother Anselm. "Now. . . . Evil is like that

shadow. God does not cause evil any more than the sun caused that shadow. Neither is evil a thing in itself any more than the shadow is. God radiates nothing but goodness, just as the sun radiates nothing but light. But He allows obstacles to get in the way of His goodness. And then, what happens? You get an absence of goodness—called evil.”

“Then God allows evil?” The Pessimist sounded more hopeful.

“Certainly. But, mind you, in the physical realm this absence of goodness is not strictly an evil at all. It is merely a failure to attain perfection—disease is a failure to attain perfect health. Why shouldn’t there be failures in Nature? This universe is finite and therefore limited in perfection. I would go even further—why shouldn’t this world be all the better for some things failing? Why shouldn’t it be all the better for pain and suffering? Don’t you think the Christian revelation gives us a glimpse of the immense value of suffering?”

“If it is true—of human suffering, yes; but not of animal suffering.”

“How do you know animals *do* suffer?” said Brother Anselm. “Certainly they do not know pain as we do. Their bodily organization is far simpler than ours. Neither have they rational minds like ours to intensify pain. They are not self-conscious like us. The yelping of a dog being whipped does not necessarily mean pain: it may merely mean a reaction to what is bad for its body. Animal suffering is enormously exaggerated. Judged by the sentiments of some people animal life might almost be a cruel joke. Normally it is anything but painful; it is rapturously happy. However, when it comes to the question of why animals should

suffer at all, if they do, then I admit that, beyond teaching self-preservation, the place of animal suffering cannot be seen clearly. Suffering, all suffering is a mystery; I don't deny it. That, of course, is merely because we don't know God's eternal plan. Our understanding is very limited. All the more reason for trusting the Almighty."

"Um!" said the Pessimist. "That seems to me like asking people to shut their eyes to what is evil in the plan, and go on trusting blindly."

"No, no—the reverse. I am trying to open your eyes to what is *not* evil in the plan—pain and suffering. At the same time I am certainly asking you to accept the limitations of your finite mind, if you call that 'trusting blindly.' It is the world that shuts its eyes to *evil*—moral evil, sin." Brother Anselm paused. "Now this is what I want to say.—Sin is the only real evil. *That* is not in the plan, but in man. God could not plan sin. If He could, He would be the cause of it, as your challenge implied. Sin is man's rejection of God. God could not will the rejection of Himself: He cannot be the cause of sin."

The Pessimist stuck to his guns: "But if He is the cause of man He is the cause of what a man does."

"That depends," said the monk. "God is the cause of man, yes. He is the cause, too, of man's free-will; also of what a man is intended to produce—goodness. But He is not the cause of man's failure to produce goodness—called sin. Sin is man's failure, not God's. It is due to the misuse of man's free-will."

The Pessimist considered.

"No," he said, "perhaps I was wrong. You don't ask people to shut their eyes; you ask them to shut their mouths."

It was his first attempt at humour. Brother Anselm laughed. "In the sense of not opening them to criticize the Almighty, yes."

The Pessimist considered again.

"You people have no occasion to criticize: you have faith."

"Faith, of course, is everything," replied the monk. "And it is given to all who ask. But even faith does not solve every problem. It enables us to assent to what God has revealed. It is not an *open sesame* to all the problems of life. We Catholics *might* start criticizing the Deity for not revealing more. . . . What happens to unbaptized infants? God has chosen to leave their lot veiled in mystery. Are we then to become suspicious? Are we to shake our fists at heaven? Such an attitude would be not merely blasphemous, it would be stupid and irrational. God created those babes solely out of love. He created them to be immortal. Cannot we trust their immortal state to the Love that gave them being? . . . That is only one example. You see what I mean? We simply *must* trust. Any other attitude would be folly."

"There are problems then for all?" The Pessimist's attitude was softening.

"No," answered Brother Anselm. "There are no problems for anybody really."

"How do you mean?"

"There are no problems for God, because He understands. There are no problems for us, because we are not meant to understand—at present. The only problems are those men make for themselves."

Brother Anselm put his hand on the other's shoulder.

"There are mysteries though. And one of them is

a shadow that falls upon the earth. It was that shadow, at its darkest, that fell upon Him Who *made* the earth. He has never allowed that shadow to fall upon His children as it fell upon Himself. He has never asked them to suffer what He suffered Himself as Man. . . . Don't you think He understands? Don't you think we may leave His creation to Him? "

The Pessimist walked across to the parapet and stood there with his arms folded. He remained wrapped in thought. Suddenly he turned round and faced the Cripple.

"I want to ask you something extremely personal. I am slow to change my opinions. A comparatively brief discussion is not sufficient justification for doing so. Whether I change them eventually may depend a good deal on you—on what you say now. Of course you may not care to answer me——"

"I'll answer you on one condition," the Cripple replied.

"Yes? "

"That you will free yourself from the influence of—of a certain person. I have decided to do so myself. You know whom I mean."

The Pessimist thought for a moment. He had seen that malicious influence at work, and its effects. . . .

"Yes, I can promise that."

"Fire away, then."

He took stock of the Cripple, and then said: "My question may be embarrassing to you, but your answer may be enlightening to me. It is this. You are a test-case for my theory of life, if I may put it like that. You are one of life's victims. You, if any, I should

say have cause to despair. Does my idea of life ring true to you? . . . Now, does it? "

The Cripple replied without hesitation: "No, it does not. It rings false—utterly false. I must admit—I'm ashamed of it—that I did adopt the policy of despair at first; partly under influence. But somebody worked day and night to save me from myself—and he's done it. Despair is the refuge of cowards and shirkers; I'm certain of it. It demoralizes. It unmans, paralyses; it draws out all that is worst in a man. It made me behave like a low-down cad. The slough of despond has become loathsome to me."

"Brother Anselm's—er—strong personality has undoubtedly influenced you; I can certainly see that."

"It isn't only that," said the Cripple. "It's what he says. It appeals to me—to my reason. It rings true. You wonder if it is true. I believe it is. I only know that it has made life worth living again. I've—I've sort of put my hand in God's; and I'm happy."

The Pessimist's reply was checked by Brother Anselm. "Don't say now whether you believe me or not; my—er—strong personality might influence your decision. Instead, tell me what made you a pessimist."

"The War," replied the other.

"Funny!" said Brother Anselm. "It made me a monk."

The Cripple pricked up his ears.

"Were *you* in the War?"

"I was. Battery doctor—Gunners," replied Brother Anselm.

"Good gracious! . . . You never told me. I say, we must have a pow-wow about all this. . . . Did you get through all right?"

"Looks like it."

"Did you get knocked out?"

"Rather!—inside out; all to bits. Brought back in a jug."

"No, but seriously?"

"Well, hardly knocked out. I was wounded, though."

"How——"

The Cripple stopped short. There was a look about Brother Anselm which told him not to ask more. . . . He felt mystified. It was the second time the monk had pulled him up like this.

They drove back in the twilight down the long winding road. Nearing the monastery gates another car overtook and passed them in a whirl of dust; but not before Brother Anselm had caught a glimpse of its occupant—leaning forward to observe the Cripple on his stretcher. It was the Atheist! . . . There was an unpleasant smile on his face. The monk did not like that smile.

He did not tell the Cripple whom he had seen.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MAJOR AT THE MONASTERY

“ I REMEMBER him well,” said the Major. “ Good-looking boy—fair hair. He wasn’t in my battery ; but I used to run into him pretty often. Poor devil ! Poor devil ! . . . Up at some monastery place ? I’ll go and see him.”

“ I’ll take you there myself,” said the Atheist.

An unexpected opportunity of getting in touch with the Cripple had presented itself. Except for that fleeting glimpse from his car the Atheist had not seen him since his return to the monastery a week ago. His instinct had told him he would not be welcome there. However, common courtesy would prevent any unpleasantness on the monk’s part if he appeared in the rôle of the Major’s friend. Good manners obviously demanded that he should conduct him there on his visit of sympathy, and present him to the Cripple.

Most timely ! The Major and he had met and recognized each other in the hotel lounge, half an hour before. Their last meeting had been at the front during the War. As Gunners’ officers they had served in the same battery.

“ Are you all right again yourself ? ” asked the Major, interrupting his thoughts. “ You were nearly done in, weren’t you—that night on the ridge ? I

never saw you again after that wipe-out. Er—did you ever find out who it was—the man who got you back?”

“No,” said the Atheist. “I never saw him. I was unconscious. He seems to have got me down to the dressing-station before I came round. That was all I could discover.”

“I found out later who it was,” said the Major in a guarded tone.

“Did you? . . . Who was it? Why didn’t you let me know?”

“I was not allowed to,” the Major replied. “He asked me *not* to let you know.”

“Oh! . . . But surely you can tell me now.”

“No, I don’t think I can. He made me promise. As far as I can see I am still bound by that promise. I haven’t seen him since the War. I only asked whether you knew because I thought you might have found out yourself.”

“Oh well,” said the Atheist, “if you can’t, I won’t press you further. But I wonder why he didn’t want me to know.”

“Yes,” meditated the Major. “I wonder why.”

The following afternoon they started off for the monastery. They left the road half-way up for the path across the fields. The Atheist thought that by entering the grounds at the side of the monastery they could reach the garden, where the Cripple would probably be, leaving Brother Anselm unaware of their arrival. In that case he might get a few minutes alone with the Cripple: it could be suggested to the Major that he should look over the monastery and the church, famous for their architectural beauty.

His surmise was correct. As they entered the garden

the Cripple could be seen in his ambulance under the trees—and alone. He was reading a book. It seemed to absorb his attention ; for the two had almost reached him, before he looked up. He regarded them for a moment with surprise—a perceptible annoyance clouding his face as he saw the Atheist.

“ Well, do you remember me ? ” said the Major.

The Cripple looked hard at him. The annoyance changed to a smile of recognition.

“ My dear Major ! . . . Yes, it's you ! Where on earth have you blown from ? ”

The Major proceeded to account for his sudden appearance. The Atheist fetched a chair from the arbour, and the other sat down at the Cripple's side. There would be no chance yet, he thought ; these two must have their talk first. He strolled about examining the flowers. There was an unpleasant look on his face. He had noticed the Cripple's annoyance at seeing him. He had also noticed the book he was reading. It was a religious one.

The Major and the Cripple were soon engaged in animated conversation, recalling old times—the days with the Gunners at the front. Twenty minutes passed. The Atheist began to get impatient. The monk might turn up at any moment. . . .

“ I'm anxious that you should look round the monastery and church. They're very fine specimens—fifteenth century.”

“ Eh, what ? ” said the Major. “ Oh, I don't know. I'm not much of a hand at architecture. I'd sooner have a pow-wow here, I think.”

The Atheist tried again :

“ Come for a moment, then, and get a view from over there.”

"Excuse me," said the Major to the Cripple.

When they were out of earshot the Atheist put his hand on the Major's shoulder: "Would you let me have a few minutes alone with him? Something confidential, you know."

"Certainly, certainly," agreed the Major. "I'll look round for a bit at the monastery. Fifth century, you said?"

"Fifteenth," replied the Atheist. He walked back towards the Cripple.

"Make a fine barracks that!" said the Major to himself, surveying the great front of the monastery. As he stood there a side door opened. A monk came out and walked in his direction. The Major raised his hat as he approached—and then stared. Brother Anselm (for it was he) bowed—and stared too. Then simultaneously they stretched out hands. . . .

"Well, I'm damned!" exclaimed the Major. "It's the Doc! . . ."

He gripped again.

"Heavens alive, man! After all these ages! . . . Yes, it's the Doc! . . . But what—what *are* you doing here? What's this get-up?"

"I'm a monk now."

"Hold me up!" said the Major. "It'll take a couple of stiffs to bring me round."

Brother Anselm laughed and put his arm through the other's.

"Dear old Major! It's awfully good to see you again. But what are *you* doing here? Going to join the Order?"

They sat down on a bench near by and began questioning each other. The Major related his meeting

with the Atheist at the hotel and his discovery of the Cripple. Brother Anselm had never come across the Cripple at the front? No. He would like to know more about the accident. He couldn't quite make out the Atheist——

"He never told me you were here."

"He doesn't remember me," said Brother Anselm. "He has never recognized me; though I knew him at once—the night of the accident. He knew me very little out there. But I knew *him* rather well, you see."

"And didn't much care for him, if I remember right. I could never quite make him out myself; though he was pleasant enough in the mess."

"Oh yes, he was pleasant enough."

"I wonder why you—why you—well, you know. . . ."

"Never mind that!" said Brother Anselm. His grey eyes searched the Major. "Remember your promise still binds. You remember it, don't you?"

"I do. I had to remember it yesterday. We were talking about that night. He has never found out——"

"Don't let him know you knew me out there." Brother Anselm sounded peremptory.

"Doc, you're the——"

"Cut it, man, cut it! Er—I might as well mention that he and I are not on the best of terms."

"That so?" replied the Major. "He didn't seem to mind coming up here—insisted on bringing me himself."

"Bringing you? Is he here now?"

"In that garden part, yes. He wanted a few minutes with—— What's the matter?"

Brother Anselm had suddenly risen and was looking in the direction of the garden. His face had become grave. . . .

"If you don't mind," he said, "I think we'll join them."

"The devil!" muttered the Major. "There's going to be trouble."

CHAPTER IX

BROTHER ANSELM AND THE ATHEIST

THE Major followed Brother Anselm through the grounds. The monk walked quickly and seemed almost to have forgotten his presence. As they entered the garden it became apparent that trouble of some kind had already begun. A high-pitched voice was audible. They came into the open of the lawn. Under the trees at the other end the Atheist was standing, back to them, in a nonchalant attitude, surveying the Cripple who was flushed with anger. He was plainly resenting something the Atheist had said.

"You can go and take your lies with you ! They're not wanted here. He knows a darned sight more about religion than you do. You——"

"Good afternoon," said Brother Anselm. The Atheist wheeled round. For a fraction of a second he was nonplussed—but no more.

"Good afternoon." And he held out his hand.

Brother Anselm did not notice it ; his look was on the Cripple. There was a strained silence. The Major blew his nose. . . .

"Perhaps"—Brother Anselm turned to the Atheist—"perhaps you would be wiser to go."

An unpleasant glint appeared in the other's eyes.

"Thank you for your courteous suggestion."

"And you for your courteous intrusion," replied the monk.

The Atheist hesitated. . . . His departure would be an acknowledgment of defeat. It would make him look an utter fool in the Major's eyes. . . . He assumed indifference.

"Oh well, I have no desire to trespass on anybody's preserves. And, of course, your neophyte in religion requires careful protection. I always understood hot-house treatment was the best. I suppose religion is too fragile to be exposed to the breath of criticism."

"Don't imagine," said Brother Anselm unruffled, "that my suggestion indicated any fear for my 'neophyte's' religion. I should say from what I heard that he is quite capable of looking after it himself. If by 'criticism' you mean your own lying arguments, may I remind you that you train yourself to the finger-tips in those arguments and then take a mean advantage of those who have not even studied them. You deliberately schemed to work off your stuff on him in my absence. However, I am here now—if you wish me to deal with you."

The Atheist just managed to check his anger.

"Am I to understand that you withdraw your suggestion that I should go? You would like to——"

"I never suggested you *should* go: I said you would be *wiser* to go."

The other failed to appreciate the significance of the remark; but instead saw a chance of saving his pride—also of humiliating the monk. He would stop and—yes, a monk would be easy. . . . He would be gracious.

"I must ask your pardon for misunderstanding you. I don't wish for any unpleasantness myself. May I

remark that you misjudged me in supposing that I reserved myself for neophytes. Let me put to *you* what I was saying to our friend——”

Brother Anselm turned to the Major. “I must apologise for inflicting this on you. I have given this—gentleman a chance to leave; since he refuses his chance I shall take mine of letting him know exactly what I think of him.”

He turned back to the Atheist—

“Please don’t think that I am going to enter into an argument with you, at any rate of the kind you are hoping for. It would be a waste of breath. You hate religion and you hate God. I doubt if you even believe your own lies against His existence; you pay too much attention to Him to disbelieve in Him. You hate Him too much. Men don’t hate what doesn’t exist.”

This was the reverse of what the Atheist wanted. He had hoped to draw the monk and then make him look foolish by ridiculing his arguments. Instead he was being lashed with scorn. He flared out:

“You’re infernally rude, sir. I didn’t stay here to be insulted.”

“You are at liberty to go whenever you like. That’s the way—across the fields.”

The Atheist looked at the others. The Major was lighting a cigarette uncomfortably; the Cripple watching Brother Anselm. He felt maddened at being humiliated before them; exasperated by his inability to get to grips with the monk. If he went now, it would be like a whipped cur slinking off. No, he couldn’t. . . .

“Very well,” said Brother Anselm. “You choose to stay. So you pretend that I am insulting you. I

wish I were. Unfortunately I know you better than you are aware of. You deserve far more than you are getting: you deserve no mercy. I have in my mind at this moment the havoc you have worked with your glib tongue. The crime of murder is light compared with the perpetual crime in which you are engaged. A murderer of bodies is harmless compared with a murderer of souls. Your life is one long endeavour to strangle religion in every soul that you can. That is how you work off your venom against the God Who made you."

"You——" Fury had mastered the Atheist now. He forgot a momentary bewilderment at the monk's knowledge of him. "You—and your God! Show me your God, and don't fling Him at me until you can. Fetch Him from His heaven! You priests find it convenient to keep Him up there, out of sight. You're wise. He's safer there. You can excuse His silence when He's far away—conceal His absence, can't you?"

The sneer failed to affect Brother Anselm. He had himself well in hand. He continued in the same deliberate way:

"Yes, my friend, God *is* silent to you, and such as you. He *is* absent from you. You don't want Him. You would hardly expect Him to force Himself upon you as you force your hatred of Him upon others. He treats even His enemies with courtesy."

"Words! Mere words!—'You and such as you!' Really! And what about the world? Does He condescend to give it a sign of His presence?"

"Would you condescend to notice if He did?" said the monk. "So He keeps in His heaven? He never gives a sign? We never show you God? Indeed! Have you ever heard of the Incarnation?"

. . . When He does the very thing you defy Him to do you refuse to believe it. You ask for a sign of His presence : when He gives one you call it a fable. You challenge us to show Him : the Catholic Church has been doing so for two thousand years. You scoff at His silence : when He speaks you deride His revelation. You won't have His Incarnation. Very well. . . . If you can conceive of any better way in which God could show Himself than by becoming Man, any better way of speaking than through human lips, any better way of being present to the world than in human form—if you can, would you suggest it ? . . .”

Brother Anselm waited. No answer came. The Atheist looked about irresolutely. . . .

“ You have no suggestion to offer ? . . . You still choose to stay ? ”

The monk resumed in the same level tone :

“ Very well. I've more for you. You said something about us excusing God's silence. Do you think we need to ? Do you think God *is* silent—to us Catholics ? Do you think all our millions have no experience of God ? Do you suppose that all the scientists and philosophers, the great thinkers of the world, who have been and are Catholics to-day—do you suppose they are all so many victims of priestcraft, terrified by mediæval moonshine, blindly believing in a God they never know ? Do you think that we could assent to the mysteries of our faith if God were silent to our souls ? Do you know that God is Personally present to each one of us—as a Personal God of love ? . . . If I could summon all our legions from the ages of the past, they would thunder back in unison the truth of what I say.”

The Atheist found his tongue again.

"Delightful credulity! Do you expect me to believe this childish nonsense?"

"Scarcely. You are not fit to believe it. I am telling you what *we* believe."

"You may believe what you like; your 'Personal God of love' won't stir a finger when it comes to the test—when you suffer, when disease and pain get hold of you. You may pray at Him then until you are black in the face. Your God has a wonderful way of showing His love!"

The Cripple suddenly fired out: "You leave God's love alone! He can love a rotter like me; I know that much, or I couldn't carry on. . . . Yes, I'm carrying on in spite of you."

So that was why he had lost his hold on the Cripple, thought the Atheist. It was not merely the monk who had done it. The Cripple himself had decided against him. It roused his malice even further. He hated failing.

"Your susceptibility to superstition is contemptible."

"Also your spite," said Brother Anselm. "So you imagine us whining and squirming before God to be released from pain and suffering—and God taking no notice. You fling that at us for the folly of trusting His love? Would you believe me if I said that we don't expect Him to make things easy for us? We don't. We expect pain and suffering——"

"I always thought Christians were fools."

"——And you implied that God does not evidence His love for us. Are you or we the ones to judge of that? Do you think we could serve others for the love of God, as we do, if God did not first love us—if we

didn't know it? . . . Have you ever heard of the Crucifixion?"

"You may keep your religion to yourself!—to yourself! Do you hear?"

"You needn't shout at me. I am not deaf," replied Brother Anselm. "I shall not keep my religion to myself. My religion is my answer to you. You shall know why we love God; and you shall know God's love for us. . . . Do you see this Crucifix I wear? Do you know what that means? Yes, look at it! . . . That is why we love God. And that is God's love for us. That is why we expect pain and suffering——"

"I said you could keep your religion to yourself!"

"I know; I heard you. I am not surprised. The very naming of the Cross is repugnant to you. You are afraid of it. It proclaims you and your kind for what you are—liars. You profess to ask for a sign of a God of love. When God reveals on the Cross His infinite love for you, you deny it. You fling it back in His face, and spit on your crucified Saviour."

Brother Anselm paused.

He then went up close to the Atheist and looked him square in the eyes. It was open war now between two powerful personalities. The monk was the calmer. The Atheist was breathing hard, clenching and unclenching his fingers in a state of nervous hesitancy. . . .

"That is all I am going to say to you now. I have said it that you may know Whom you libel. I have also said it that you may know yourself and what you are, and your own vileness, and your dirty work——"

"Damn you! you bloody monk! . . ."

"No, you don't," said Brother Anselm, catching him by the wrist. The Atheist had tried to strike him.

The Major sprang up to interfere. Brother Anselm,

however, seemed capable of looking after himself. He loosed his grip and the other's arm dropped. . . .

The Major felt something must be done. He went up to the Atheist and led him a few yards away. "Take my advice and go. It's no good. You're making a fool of yourself."

For a moment the Atheist stood there angrily conscious that he had lost all semblance of dignity. Then suddenly he whipped round—and walked off.

The abrupt climax left the others speechless, staring after the retreating figure. The Major, after a while, lit a cigarette. His hands were trembling.

"It's not my business, but why did you go at him like that?"

"I'm sorry, you two," Brother Anselm replied. "There was nothing else for it. Nothing else could have any effect on him, but a moral horse-whipping. I hated doing it; but his only chance is to realize what he is." There was no suggestion of triumph; more of sadness.

"Queer thing religion," said the Major. "Devilish queer! So that's why you weren't fond of him in the War—over religion."

The Cripple roused himself.

"Was it in the War you knew him?"

"It was," replied Brother Anselm. "He was in the same battery as myself. He's forgotten me, though."

"Good gracious! That was it?" The Cripple thought for a moment. "I see now. . . ."

"There's something else you don't know yet," said the Major.

"What's that?" asked the Cripple.

" Brother Anselm was my battery Doc."

The Cripple slowly took it in. " Well, I'm hanged !

. . . "

" And I'd very much like to tell you something more about him——"

" There'll be trouble if you do." The monk stopped him just in time.

The Cripple looked curious ; but refrained from asking questions. " So you were all three in the same battery. What a rum world ! "

" Mighty rum ! " said the Major. " And you'd think it rummier still, if this villain of a monk would let me speak."

He laid his hand affectionately on Brother Anselm's shoulder.

CHAPTER X

A THING THAT HAD TO BE DONE

BROTHER ANSELM closed his breviary. He had finished the Office for the day in his cell, an unforeseen occurrence having prevented him attending Choir with the other monks.

After the Major's departure the Cripple had said something about not feeling well. Brother Anselm had taken him back to bed, and then for an hour or more he had watched him through an agony of stabbing, torturing pain. Throughout no word of complaint had escaped his lips. Brother Anselm had noticed his eyes resting at times on the Crucifix hanging on the wall. When the attack had passed the Cripple had lain quiet for a little, and then asked him a curiously direct question: "Supposing you were in my position; supposing you knew that you had to lie on your back for the rest of your days, cut off from the pleasures of life, and having at times to suffer pain like this—how exactly would you take it?" Brother Anselm had looked at the youthful face all drawn and white, and then through the window into the distance where the sun was sinking into long lines of purple, before he answered. "How would I take it? I would take it as an honour—an honour to be chosen for the royal road of pain; and I would take it as a privilege, to be

asked to share so fully the Cross with Christ." And the Cripple had just said—"Thank you."

He was now in a sleep of sheer exhaustion.

Brother Anselm laid his breviary on the table.

He rested his chin on his hand and looked out into the night. The evening star had not yet set. It hung there twinkling, crystallised in the deepening blue. His mind turned to the events of the afternoon. He could feel no regret for what he had said to the Atheist. It might have some effect. It might have none. In the latter case, and if he gave further trouble, there was only one way left of bringing him to shame—to that shame of himself without which he would never change. Yes, one way was left.

He was thankful now that the other had not remembered him as doctor of the battery, thankful too that he had never found out who had saved his life. For the other's ignorance left him in possession of a powerful moral weapon to use, if necessary; much though he disliked the idea of using it at all.

As he looked out into the peace of the night, another night recalled itself. A night at the front; a night of horrors—the night on which he had saved the Atheist's life.

The vivid memory of it all came back:

... They were retreating; had been retreating for two days. An order had come through on the second afternoon. Their guns were to hold a section of the line, unless compelled to retire. The enemy had broken through two miles ahead. He could see the Major now, standing there with the G.H.Q. chit in his hands, looking grave as he folded it and remarking:

"That means hell. Get to work, Captain!"—and to himself: "Doc, you'd better stay here; you'll be wanted soon." For an hour or so their guns were letting loose, until he was nearly deaf from the incessant roaring bark. Once the Major had come back to the dug-out: "Won't be long now, Doc. They'll pay this back double." It was his signal.

As he climbed up into the open there came the slow, steady whistle of a delay-fuse. . . . Crump! Dead on their line. Then those guns six miles away got to work. The Major was right; it was going to be hell. The relentless shells crashed unceasingly, mercilessly, shaking the ground under his feet with their cavernous thunder, flinging up sods by the ton.

Two direct gun-hits; and his own work began. Those mangled heaps that had been men did not need attention: they were silenced like their guns. He told the dead at a glance. The wounded took all his time. Once something red-hot seemed to be drawn across his forehead. A bit of shell had grazed him. He ignored it until the blood ran down into his eyes; then told the man whose leg he was bandaging to do the same for his own head. He went on in a sort of mechanical way patching them up one by one, vaguely aware that his work was more or less futile; for the wounded themselves were being killed off now. The stretcher-bearers were doing their utmost, but it was impossible to cope with the havoc of this cruel barrage. The air was thick with the smell of smoke and blood. He wondered when the Major would give the order to retire. They would be wiped out before long. It was getting dark, too. The flaming explosions were now lighting up the white, staring faces of the gunners. They were working the guns still in action in a sort of

mad, hopeless way ; listening amidst the din, like himself, for the word that meant release.

It came at last—that order. Then the clanking of harness and the drivers cursing their horses up the hill, guns being hitched and pulled off at a gallop, the tattered remnant of gunners hurriedly following—nervous to leave the hell-spot.

The Major remained there peering about him. “ Seen the Captain, Doc ? ” No, he had not ; but supposed he was with the gunners. The other seemed satisfied. He saw the rest of the wounded taken away, then joined the Major. They lit a cigarette each, took a last look at that scene of devastation, and made their way down to the waggon-lines. There the Major received another order from G.H.Q. They were to retire to a position four miles back. Their infantry-lines had been broken through again. The enemy was only a mile away.

The Major was asking for the Captain : he could not be found. “ Seen him yet, Doc ? ” No, not a sign, he had replied. They must clear off anyway, said the Major ; and he went to attend to the guns and waggons. A gunner came up—could he speak to the Doctor ? He had seen the Captain knocked out close to his own gun ; his leg was broken, he believed—thought he had been taken to the dressing-station. . . .

(Brother Anselm remembered those next few minutes very clearly.)

. . . He suddenly understood. He knew quite well that the Captain had *not* been taken to the dressing-station ; that he must have been overlooked, and left up there amongst the horrors of that death-trap. He walked away from the shouting and noise of the battery preparing to start, and in the darkness strained his

eyes to make out their recent position. Yes, he could see the rise of the hill, the lurid glare of shell-bursts revealing it in black outline. The Captain was there—somewhere. . . .

He paced about in an agony of indecision.

There was no obligation upon him to do it. Why should he? Why should he try to save a man against whose vile, lying ways his whole being revolted—merely to give him further opportunities? He had discovered his evil influence in the battery already, and the Captain had only been a few weeks with them. They had scarcely crossed each other's paths; for his work as medical officer took him away from the mess for most of the day. But he had heard sufficient to know that all the Captain's spare time was spent in trying to instil unbelief and even malice against God into others—he had a way with him, it seemed, that made them listen. . . . No, he couldn't. . . . Oh, why that man of all men? . . . But left there to die like a dog with all that infamy upon him? Could he? . . . He couldn't leave him like that. Suddenly he knew he would do it.

He found his batmen holding his horse ready; the battery was on the point of starting. He ascertained from another officer their next position; then, after swinging himself into the saddle, he leant down to his batman: "Tell the Major I'll get there on my own, see?" The batman saluted and disappeared.

He dug with his heels and rode out of the turmoil round to the right, as if going on in advance. As soon as the darkness hid him from sight, he wheeled his horse round. "No, you don't!"—and he dug at its sides until the unwilling beast plunged forward, and then sidled along the road whinnying to its com-

panions in the dark. "Shut up! . . . Sorry, my beauty, but it's got to be done. Come on!" He patted the horse's neck and urged it into a canter. His eyes were growing used to the dark, and the white of the road made going fairly easy. After half a mile he pulled up, searching for the track up the hill to the left. He found it. The hard clatter of the road changed to the squelch of mud. "Quietly! don't put us down!" Half-way up he dismounted. Shells were dropping again and there were too many holes. He led his horse carefully until they reached the top. There he halted and took his bearings. On the right a quarter of a mile away he could just see the line of the road running over the hill. There were figures against the horizon hurrying along—their infantry, he guessed. Fritz must be pretty close. Now, which was his way? That was the line of dug-outs. Where had the guns—

This one was coming a bit too— "Steady now! . . ." A blinding flash! The ground heaved up with a deafening roar. He felt himself almost lifted, and then flung down half-buried in mud and sods—choking to get his breath. . . . He waited; then gradually freed himself and struggled to his feet—dazed and shaking. It was all blinding smoke. . . . His horse? . . . That dark bulk lying there? He slowly perceived what had happened. The horse had taken the shell, blast and all—and saved him. It was dead. He looked at it with a pang. His hand was dripping, running with blood. It was from his arm. He took off his tunic, found some bandages in the pocket, and with teeth and fingers bound up the wound. It was a nasty gash. He succeeded in nearly staying the flow.

"Now, get on with it!" Where had those guns been? Another shell-burst lit up the scene for a

second and gave him a glimpse of gun wreckage a hundred yards ahead. He went forward carefully avoiding shell-holes, and reached what had been their gun-line. It would be somewhere along here.

He put his hands to his mouth, shouted the Captain's name, and listened. An eerie silence followed. He tried again. . . . Only the wind answered, sweeping over the ridge to mock his effort. He would have to search then, amongst the dead. Gruesome job ; but it had to be done. He began at the far end, picking his way among them—some with faces turned to heaven, some to earth—looking closely for three stars on the shoulder-strap. He came to a group of three lying close to a twisted gun-wheel. As he bent down his doctor's intuition told him that the one in the middle was—not a corpse. There were three stars on the shoulder-strap. He struck a match. A gust of wind blew it out ; but not before he had recognized—the Captain !

The cynical twist of the mouth was what he had seen. It was enough. He was alive, but unconscious ; evidently from loss of blood. The left leg was broken and the puttee still oozing warmly. That must be stopped. He wound his remaining bandages round tightly above the wet part. The Captain began to mutter unintelligibly and then lapsed again into unconsciousness.

If he had had his horse ! He could have managed fairly well then. It would be no easy matter carrying this helpless man over the shell-riddled ground. The strain of the last few hours combined with his recent experience and loss of blood was beginning to tell on him. But it had to be done. About four hundred yards he guessed it would be to the nearest point of the road, keeping along the ridge.

He knelt and hauled the Captain's body on to his back with his arms dangling over his shoulders ; then, gripping the wrists, struggled to his feet and started. He got clear of the wreckage and corpses. He wished those shells would stop ; they were landing now between him and the road. They didn't matter to himself—he had got to a stage when nothing seemed to matter—but he had to get the Captain back. He staggered on. . . . He must be half-way. They were bursting close now. Clods of earth were hitting him. He set his teeth. His head began to feel funny—silly. Everything seemed to be aiming at him. There were lights dancing. . . . " Don't be a fool ! get on with it, man ! " It had to be done. With a fierce effort of will he went on. Then he began to lurch about. The Captain was getting heavier. . . . The ground was coming at him. . . .

He regained consciousness to find himself and the Captain lying in a shell-hole. With great difficulty he sat up—dizzy and sick, vaguely realizing that he had collapsed. He was played-out. His forehead and arm were both bleeding again. He tried to stand ; but his head whizzed, and he sank back in a stupid, feeble way. The Captain was talking deliriously to himself, roused by the shock of the fall. He pulled him into an easier position, lay still to recover a little, and then, dragging himself up painfully on hands and knees, managed to crawl over the edge of the shell-hole.

The moon was coming up above the line of the ridge, revealing the hideous desolation all round—cavities and tree-stumps standing out blackly against the pale light. There was something white near by. Was

it——? Yes, it was the road. He had nearly done it, then! He followed the white track with aching eyes. It was empty now of those hurrying figures. . . . No, it was not. There were some men scurrying along—only a hundred yards away! He shouted. . . .

The sharp whistle of a shell came, and he saw them crouching for the burst. Then two more—and they were running to get out of range. They had not heard him. . . .

He watched their figures recede into the distance and disappear. A sense of helplessness came upon him. He searched the road again. Not a soul in sight; only those ghostly tree-stumps everywhere. He looked down at the Captain lying there. . . . A thought came to him. Without that burden. . . . "You blackguard! you blackguard! No, you don't. You get back with him, or you don't get back at all."

He was too weak now to carry the Captain a yard further. He could only watch the road for any help that might appear. The feeling of isolation increased. Not a living being about. Nothing but death here. Dead stumps, dead bodies, dead—— Something arrested his eyes.

Curious he hadn't seen it before! Close behind the shell-hole stood a great, gaunt crucifix—the Christ hanging pale and vivid in the moonlight. With an effort he stood up, and saluted. He noticed that it was untouched by shells; one of the many wayside shrines that had escaped. Something struck him about the Figure. The half-closed eyes of the Crucified seemed to be looking down into the shell-hole at the man who was lying there—at the man who was His enemy. He stood, spell-bound by what he saw in that moonlit Christ stretched there amidst the terrors

of the ridge. For it had come to him that Someone had suffered immeasurably more than himself—yes, infinitely more—for that mocking unbeliever below. He went and laid his blood-stained head against the wounded Feet. . . .

“Hullo there! Do you want to get cut off?”

He turned round with a start to see a limber-cart drawn up on the road. He called back loudly. Someone was springing down—running across to him. He went forward.

“Spotted you from the road. What’s up?” The voice was familiar; and, as its owner came close, he recognized him for an officer of their own infantry.

“Why, it’s not——? Yes, it is! Doc, what *are* you doing here?”

He pointed down the shell-hole. “Help me get him back, will you?”

The other took in the situation at a glance, and shouted to the driver of the limber-cart, who jumped down and hurried over to them.

“Go and talk to the horses, Doc, will you? We’ve just come through Hades. We’ll bring him along; you’re done in.—Here, have a pull at this!”

Five minutes later they were going down the road at a gallop, the Captain propped up against them on the floor of the cart. Half-an-hour, and they were at the dressing-station. The orderlies on duty carried the Captain inside. An M.O. came and looked at him. He was then taken, still unconscious, into the examining room.

As the infantry officer clambered back on to the limber-cart he said to him:

"Thank you for the good turn. Will you do me another?"

"What's that?"

"Forget about finding me with him up there."

The other had been guessing things on the way back. He understood. There was an immense admiration in his eyes as he replied:

"If you really want me to, yes. But, Doc—Oh, Doc, you're great! . . . Cheerio!"

And the limber-cart passed into the night.

He went back into the hut to have his own wounds attended to. The M.O. recognized him, commented on the mud and blood, but asked no questions. The Captain, he found, was to be taken down immediately to the C.C.S. His own case was not so serious—flesh-wounds and loss of blood; he would wait and go down in the morning.

When he reached the Clearing Station next day, he found it was not the one to which the Captain had been taken. On the whole he was glad. It saved explanations.

Four weeks later he had rejoined his battery—fit again. To his surprise the Major had guessed the truth about his disappearance. The man who had seen the Captain knocked-out had also seen himself riding off towards the ridge. He had informed the Major of both facts. The Major had also learnt of his arrival with the Captain at the dressing-station.

"Doc," he had challenged him, "look me in the face and say you didn't go and get him! You saved his life. You're blushing like a two-year old."

He had admitted it, but refused to give more than the barest outline of what he had gone through that

night. Then he had bound the Major by a solemn promise to tell no one. The Major had given his promise very reluctantly.

The Captain, he learnt later, had recovered, to be stationed at home for the rest of the War. They had never met again until the night of the accident. And the other had forgotten him and had not found out. . . .

The clock in the tower struck midnight.

Brother Anselm started—to find himself staring into the night. He sighed. Memories slipped away into the past once more. He stood up slowly. Then he went out of his cell down the corridor and had a last look at the Cripple. He was sleeping peacefully.

Down at the hotel another man also looked out of his window into the night. It was the Atheist. He was thinking about the monk.

His eyes were gleaming with hatred.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAJOR NEEDS A TONIC

§ 1

“**R**EAD it, and tell me what you think,” said the Cripple, handing an opened letter to Brother Anselm.

It was some days later. No more had been seen of the Atheist at the monastery. According to the Optimist, who had been up once or twice, he had turned silent and unsociable. On one occasion there had been heated words between him and the Major. He had accused the latter of not supporting him against “the monk’s insults,” and the Major had replied frankly: “I saw no occasion to support you. Brother Anselm was not insulting you; he was telling you some home-truths.” After this relations between them had been somewhat strained. The Pessimist also added fuel to the fire by reading some book on philosophy lent him by Brother Anselm. The Atheist had sneered at him for “coming under the monk’s influence.” The other had retorted: “If I am, then I prefer it to yours.” The Optimist had related all this, adding: “He even objects to my coming up here—says he’s sorry to notice me ‘losing my intellectual independence.’”

To-day the Cripple had received a letter from his people in England. It had come with the afternoon

post. He had been reading it through in his favourite place, under the trees in the garden. Brother Anselm had just joined him after Choir-office—to be greeted with the above request.

“Do you want me to read it all?” said the monk.

“Nothing private, I mean?”

“Only one or two things about—— Well yes, read it all.”

Brother Anselm smoothed out the sheets. On the corners of each were stamped the family arms. He read it through, and then gave it back to the Cripple.

“May I have a little time to think it over?”

“Yes, rather! Sort of wants thinking over, doesn’t it?”

The Cripple spoke lightly; but there was a dread at his heart. The letter concerned his future—the future that he knew he would have to face.

“Anyway,” he added, “that’s that! . . . The Major’s coming to tea, isn’t he? Before he arrives—er—I want to tell you something.”

“Do. Get it off your chest.” Brother Anselm spread himself on the grass.

The Cripple cleared his throat.

“Well, you know what you said that day about the crucible—being tested and all that. I’ve—I’ve sort of plunged right in now—into the crucible. It was that day up at the village, I think, in the church at Benediction. It began there. God suddenly became real to me—quite close. He was a real Person Who loved me. I can’t describe it; but there it was. I told Him what a blackguard I was; all about the appalling things I’d done—my sins, especially the damned rotten way I’d cursed Him—I hardly dared think about that. I was almost afraid to tell Him—

but then, of course, He knew. I think that crowd in the church made it easier, all those babies and dogs and people. There they were all bang in His presence, and He seemed to love it—and love them all. I could tell Him then—and how appallingly sorry I was——”

He cleared his throat again.

“——I told Him too that I was just *going* to accept what had happened to me, and not grouse—I mean complain—any longer. Then, you remember when that attack of pain came on, when you got me back to bed. I’d often noticed the crucifix hanging on the wall before, but it didn’t mean much. It began to mean something then. As the pain got worse, I remembered what I’d read in that book you lent me, about sharing the Cross with Christ ; so I asked—well, if I might. I can’t quite explain how ; but when I’d done it, although the pain was terrible, it was different. It was as if I’d given Him the pain. The pain was still there of course ; but the weight of it, that crushing part, had gone. The awful part seemed upon Him, not me. . . . But what came to me—of course, you’d said it, I know—but it came with such terrific force that it was God, that it really was God Himself on the Cross. It seemed so terrible, and so—magnificent.”

The Cripple paused.

“ Yes ? ” said Brother Anselm. “ Go on.”

“ I don’t exactly know how to go on. . . . It’s like this. I’ve found out God ; and I know He is a God of love. I just know it. But—I feel there’s more than this. I still feel vague about things. All those people in the church were so—definite in their way of setting about it. They knew exactly what to do. They’d got something more, I’m sure of it. I didn’t belong to them somehow. . . . And you’re just the same.

You're different to me. You've got something more—and I can't quite make out what it is. You are—inside somewhere. When you're talking to me, I feel that I'm outside. I'm sorry I can't put it better, but——”

“ You couldn't put it better,” said Brother Anselm.

The Cripple moved himself towards the edge of the ambulance.

“ You understand, then ? Well, what is it—this sort of *outside* feeling ? ”

Brother Anselm decided to risk it.

“ I know exactly what it is you feel, and I know why you feel it. But first tell me this. Have you any religious prejudices, commonly called ? ”

“ None whatever. I'm supposed to be a Protestant, I think. My people are Protestants, I believe ; though they don't go anywhere. Yes, I'm sure they are, because there was an awful row once—when some relation became a Catholic.”

Brother Anselm sat up and roared with laughter, until the tears ran down his face.

“ Forgive me. I really am sorry ; but—— Oh dear ! ” He went off again. . . . “ I'm terribly rude ; but, you know, your test of Protestantism is a bit funny. Now, let's be serious.” He wiped his cheeks. “ You don't feel like that yourself about the Catholic Church ? ”

“ Not a bit.”

“ Very well. Now about that ‘outside feeling.’ Answer me this. Is it a mere feeling of curiosity ; or is it a feeling of wanting something more than you have already ? ”

“ I think it's something more that I want ; a sort of hankering that I can't get rid of.”

"And something more that I have, which you have not?"

"Yes.—Yes it is."

"Shall I tell you what you want?"

"Yes, I wish you would."

Brother Anselm plunged.

"You want the Catholic Church. You could not have that 'outside feeling' otherwise. Every convert to the Catholic religion has it before he becomes a Catholic. The Catholic Church is God's kingdom. You are outside God's kingdom—outside your home. That feeling of yours is home-sickness——"

"Which is the Tradesman's entrance?" It was the Major's voice that broke in upon them. "No, don't mind me, don't take any notice of me; I'm only the guest. I'll go and talk to the cook."

Brother Anselm rose from the grass and went forward to meet him.

"Sorry I didn't see you coming. Next time you shall have a procession of monks to receive you. Dear old Major! How are you? . . . Now, can you two amuse yourselves while I get tea? . . . Don't play pranks with that perambulator, Major! . . . No, he doesn't want wheeling about—not peevish to-day. . . . No, don't stand at his head; he's not a horse. Sit at his feet. . . . No, not *on* his feet! And that's not a gun-carriage. . . . Get off it, you hippopotamus! . . . Now, sit down—on the chair." The Major was bounced into the chair.

"You ought to have been a sergeant-major, not a monk. You've burst my collar." This was a parting shot at Brother Anselm walking off. "Great lad, the Doc!" he remarked to the Cripple. He attended to his collar, and then settled himself in the chair. "I

can't get over this *monk* business though. Thought monks a bit queer, myself—shutting themselves up and all that. Doesn't seem to have changed him. Knew he was an R.C. of course in the Army—religious enough. But a *monk*! Can't imagine him knuckling under here."

"Why don't you ask him how he does it?" said the Cripple.

§ 2

Brother Anselm arrived with the tea shortly, including a generous supply of bread and butter, honey and cakes.

"Great scrounge that!" said the Major, eyeing the feast. "Where did you pinch it? Still got your old Army ways? . . . I say, I want to ask you something. Er—how do you manage to knuckle under here?"

"What exactly do you mean?" said the monk.

"Well, obey the rules and all that?"

"Oh, I see. It's not so very difficult. We're here to obey rules."

"Are they strict—the rules?"

"Very strict."

"But I'd run amok in a week's time."

"Probably you would. But you're not a monk, and you're not a Catholic."

"That makes a difference?"

"Very much so. We start with a totally different idea to you. Obedience is natural, in a sense, to Catholics: we take it for granted in the Catholic Church. Authority involves obedience.—You started this, Major."

The Major played with his moustache.

"Bit—servile, isn't it, caving in like that?"

"Not in your sense," said Brother Anselm. "And not if we're 'caving in' to God's authority. It's God's authority in the Catholic Church. It doesn't matter whether it's people obeying their priests, or priests their bishops, or bishops the Pope, or monks their superiors; it's God they're all obeying. And they all know it. Remember you're English. The idea of submitting to authority in religious matters does of course seem servile to most Englishmen, because they don't even know what submitting to God means."

"Bit sweeping that, isn't it?" said the Major.

"I don't think so," replied Brother Anselm. "I'd go further. I don't think the ordinary Englishman even realizes that God is a Person to be submitted to. Is his attitude one of submission? Look at the position Almighty God occupies in England to-day! Many don't take the slightest notice of Him; they're not even on speaking terms with the Almighty; openly boast that they've no religion—think it sounds clever. Some of them don't object to the Almighty as long as He's kept in the background and doesn't interfere. Quite a lot can't distinguish between themselves and the Deity—these Theosophists and Christian Scientists and Modernists too. The most priceless of all are those who consider the Almighty rather old-fashioned, and invent a non-Almighty instead—a finite God, who is doing his best, but we must give him a helping hand. You see, all these good people simply do not know Who God is or what He is—the omnipotent Creator of heaven and earth and themselves; a Person to be submitted to, not apologized for. Even the few who are still Protestants don't

realize what being Almighty God means. It really comes to this: the non-Catholic attitude towards God is fundamentally different to the Catholic attitude. —Is this boring you, Major? "

" Not a bit of it. I like it—new to me. Didn't come up here to pick buttercups. Carry on, Doc."

" Shall I show you the difference then? " said Brother Anselm. He was deliberately talking for the benefit of the Cripple as much as the Major. He thought. . . .

" I'll show you *what* God is. That's the best way. I'll show you what we are too. . . . God is our Creator. We are His creatures. He brought us into existence out of nothing. There was no need for Him to create us, mind you ; and, even when He did, He created us not for ourselves but for Himself. Not only that, but God of His own free-will keeps us in existence. We hang upon Him like a stone on a string. If He let go the string we should instantly fall out of existence back into the nothingness from which we came.—Do you follow me? "

" Quite."

" Now those are the simple facts of our existence ; and, as rational beings, we are bound to acknowledge them, by giving to God the homage of our whole being which belongs to Him. Unconditional surrender. Unconditional submission. That is the first rational act of a human being. That is the Catholic attitude towards God—an attitude of utter self-abasement."

" Bit drastic, isn't it? " said the Major. " Sounds almost degrading. Makes a fellow feel a perfect worm."

" No, the Catholic attitude does not degrade. A man does not degrade himself by recognizing what God is and what he is. He acts in a rational manner."

The Major helped himself to honey, feeling slightly uncomfortable. He had a smack at a fly with the honey-spoon.

"Yes," he said. "I think I see now how you manage to knuckle under. Takes the stuffing out of a fellow, believing it like that."

Brother Anselm laughed.

"Well," said the Major, "every man for himself! Believe what you like—and stick to it."

"You Britisher!" said the monk.

"Why?"

"That's a typical Britisher's remark—'believe what you like.'"

"But I've a right to."

"You've no right whatever to believe what you like. You've *no* religious rights."

The Major stared open-mouthed at Brother Anselm. . . .

"Is that a joke?"

"No. It's a fact. It's what I've been saying, in another form. You're a creature, man. You've no *rights* with your Creator—let alone religious rights. Religion's to do with your Creator. The Britisher insists that he has a *right* to believe what he likes—about the Christian religion; a *right* to make up a religion of his own; a *right* to his own opinions on morals and conduct. He has no such rights. When did Christ ever say a man had a right to believe what he liked? He taught exactly the opposite. The Britisher's attitude towards the Christian religion is precisely what you would expect from his attitude towards God. It is an attitude of non-submission: he's not going to be *told* what to believe, he's not going to be *told* what to do. That is why he refuses to pass

under a certain doorway—on whose lintel is inscribed the word 'Submission.' ”

“ Look here, Doc,” said the Major, “ I’m not green. I know what you’re getting at.”

“ So do I,” replied Brother Anselm. “ And the fact that the Catholic Church demands submission ought to be sufficient in itself. What else would you expect? Isn’t the Church that Christ put into this world to exercise the authority He gave her? *His* Church was to be heard, to be obeyed, to bind and loose, to lay down laws, to excommunicate, to be believed under pain of damnation. . . . My dear Major, if all that does not mean submission, then what on earth *does* it mean? Submission to the Catholic Church means submission to God. God Himself has written that word ‘ Submission ’ over the doorway of His Church.”

The Major looked flabbergasted.

“ *Do you mean to tell me*—do you really expect the *British nation* to submit to the Catholic Church? ”

“ If the British nation does *not*,” replied the monk, “ so much the worse for the British nation. It’s very rapidly becoming a choice now of the Catholic Church or paganism.”

“ It’s rapidly becoming a choice for me of a stiff tonic or total collapse,” said the Major.

Brother Anselm stood up and began to collect the tea-things.

“ Still got your Army ways? We’ve nothing very stiff. If a liqueur will pull you round——? ”

“ Don’t press me! don’t press me! . . . Still, one likes to be sociable——”

“ I’ll do another scrounge,” said Brother Anselm.

The Major watched him disappear. He lit a cigarette, and then scrutinized the Cripple.

"Did he really mean that—that submission business? Was he serious?"

"I'm certain he was."

"Do you believe it yourself?"

"I'm beginning to think I do. As far as I can see, you're simply driven to the Catholic Church—if you want the real thing."

"But you're not——?" The Major stopped.

"Thinking about it?" The Cripple finished the sentence. "Yes, I am. I rather expect it is going to be the Catholic Church for me."

The Major gasped.

"Confession! Infallibility! Purgatory! . . . You'll have to swallow the lot!"

The Cripple smiled.

"I don't think that will be very difficult. Most Christians believe these things; why not myself? . . . Look here, Major"—the Cripple suddenly became very serious—"I want something to hang on to. I want to know what to believe. Protestants can't tell you; they simply argue about religion and all contradict each other. The Christian religion can't be like that really. If Christianity is merely a matter of opinions, I can't see what good it is to anybody, or why anybody should believe it.—A fat lot the Protestant religion means to you!—If that's Christianity, then Christianity's a darned poor sort of thing—afraid to speak out or offend anybody. Christianity *can't* be like that." The Cripple pushed his hair off his forehead. "Major, I've come bang up against the Catholic religion here—I've been watching it, and reading about it—and it's an utterly different kind of thing. It's real. It's got authority; it's perfectly certain of itself. It knows. It's not afraid of the world; it doesn't climb down

and pander to you—it doesn't lick your boots. It challenges you; dares you to deny! It's a terrific thing! . . . And these Catholics love it—passionately; I've seen them at it. It's what Christianity would be. It's what those martyrs died for, I'm certain. . . .”

The Cripple wiped his lips. His pale face was flushed.

The Major pulled vigorously at his cigarette, embarrassed at the outburst.

“ Well, as I said, every man for himself. Believe what you——”

“ Major, if you say that again, you'll not get a single drop of this ”—it was Brother Anselm with a bottle of liqueur—“ Instead, you'll get bounced again.”

The Major grabbed the white cloth off the table and brandished it on the end of his cane, in token of surrender. “ No, no! not that! Another bounce would be the end of me! . . . Doc, oh Doc, would you have me depart this life—unliqueured, unhonoured and unsung? ”

“ And unhung? ” added Brother Anselm.

CHAPTER XII

THE CRIPPLE DECIDES

IT was not until the following morning that Brother Anselm broached the matter of the letter to the Cripple.

After he had settled him as usual in the ambulance the monk wheeled him through the monastery grounds and out of the gates along the road. They were both rather silent and not quite at ease. They turned off down a lane sheltered from the heat by the cool green of the pines, and, further on, came to a halt.

Brother Anselm sat down on the grass bank at the side.

"I've been thinking over what your people say."

"Yes?"

"Shall I tell you candidly what I think?"

"Yes, please do"—anxiously.

"You know I'm very fond of you, don't you?"

The Cripple looked away. Brother Anselm controlled his voice with an effort.

"If it were a question of my own feelings only, I should ask you to stay on here at the monastery. I should love to look after you always; you know that without my telling you. But your people—well, they are your people, aren't they?—and they have to be considered. It is only natural that they should want you to go home; after all, you are their son.

Your father evidently takes it for granted that you will go home ; otherwise he would scarcely have secured this—er—male-nurse that he mentions, to look after you."

"Sort of keeper," said the Cripple, crushing down the pain at his heart. "Dear old dad ! I know it's awfully good of him ; but, oh dear ! Sounds rather like an asylum."

"I don't think there will be much difficulty there," said the monk. "You'll get used to the situation. After all, you've managed to get used to me."

"Yes, but you're *you*. And it's all part of your religion to—I mean you do it for the love of God. It makes it all so different. My helplessness doesn't seem humiliating when it's you looking after this old wreck. You do it as if it was a privilege ; and I'm not fit to lick your boots." The Cripple swallowed. He thought for a little, and then said : "Do you think I ought to go home ?"

"Yes, I do. Your father and mother want it ; also, under the circumstances, I think your natural place is at home."

"Oh, you're right ; I know you're right. But it's so horrible—the idea of leaving you, and all this. I can carry on fairly easily here ; but at home, you see, there's no religion there."

The Cripple had often talked about his home. Brother Anselm had no difficulty in picturing the life there—a family to whom the world meant everything, with a reputation of being the smartest in the county ; abundance of money, ceaseless entertaining of a loose hunting set. . . .

"No, I suppose not, from what you've told me," he said in answer. "That's the funny thing ! Your

father seems indifferent to religion himself, yet he obviously fears your staying on here in a monastery. His remark about your last letter having 'an unpleasantly Roman Catholic tone' is more what one would expect of a zealous Protestant. He hopes 'the kindness of this Brother Anselm is not influencing' you. I suppose he is afraid——"

"He's afraid of my becoming a Catholic!" burst out the Cripple. "And there'll be an awful row if I do. In fact, there *will* be an awful row, because——" He hesitated, half-fearing to say it. "Because I am going to be a Catholic."

The Cripple found those grey eyes looking into him. . . .

"In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred," said Brother Anselm, "if a person had come to an abrupt decision on the matter like that, I should have put it down to mere emotion, and told him to go on thinking and praying about it for some time longer."

The Cripple felt as if the whole interior of him were being inspected.

"With you though I don't think it is mere emotion. I answered your question yesterday as I did, because I was certain that God was opening your eyes to the truth, and because I knew you had surrendered your will. Conviction comes very quickly once a man surrenders everything to God."

The Cripple's eyes were shining. "Oh, I see it so clearly; as clearly as I see you sitting on that bank. Why—why doesn't everybody see it like this?"

"Because their eyes are blinded."

"But why? Why can't they find out?"

"I'm afraid the world sees to it, as far as possible, that they shall *not* find out. The world hates the

truth. The masses in England are kept in perpetual prejudice and ignorance of the Catholic Faith by the lies and misrepresentations of its enemies—one long campaign of dust-throwing to blind them. Even the Press to a large extent assists the world. It almost invariably supports Modernism—that lie of lies, the very antithesis of the Faith of Christ.”

“That man Inge’s a Modernist, isn’t he? Why does he hate the Catholic Church like that?”

“It’s not my business to judge Dean Inge,” said Brother Anselm. “I only hope he is one of those who ‘know not what they do.’ I only hope he is a blind leader of the blind. However——”

The monk paused. He wanted to make quite sure that the Cripple understood what becoming a Catholic meant. “Of course there are thousands who do see the truth and become Catholics, and there are thousands more who would do so if only they would give up things for God. That’s the Englishman’s curse. He’s been accustomed to a religion that costs nothing. To become a Catholic costs something—the surrender of your intellectual pride, your self-love, your sins, your friends sometimes. You may lose by it—the things of the world; and so few are prepared to do it—to sacrifice themselves for God. But I am afraid that is the entrance-price of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

The monk half expected a protest of self-sacrifice. He was glad when it did not come. The Cripple evidently took it for granted; for he remarked instead:

“Do you know the Major could scarcely believe you were serious yesterday in what you said about the Catholic Church—the submission idea?”

“Dear old Major!” said Brother Anselm. “He is a typical Britisher. I suppose it would seem a sort

of intellectual suicide to him, submitting to an infallible authority."

"He practically said so. He couldn't imagine me swallowing Infallibility!"

"And I daresay he hasn't the faintest notion what it means," smiled the monk. "The comical thing is that so few people have—and yet get purple in the face over it. As if the Church could be anything else but infallible! Infallibility is the only guarantee that the Christian religion is true. The Church that teaches the truth *must* be infallible: truth is an infallible thing. If Christianity is not infallibly true, then there is no obligation upon any man to believe it. What's the good of getting up on your hind legs to tell people you don't know what the Christian religion is, or whether it's true—that's what it means if you're not infallible. The Major of course thinks it means *blind* submission. There's nothing blind about it. The Catholic Church comes to men open-handed: 'Here are my credentials, examine them; use your reason, examine my claims for yourself!' She comes with compelling claims, with overwhelming proofs, with the beauty of God shining in her eyes. Many men see her beauty and feel its lure; but they turn away when they see that word 'Submission' inscribed above her doorway. They try and forget that they have looked into their mother's eyes."

The Cripple became pensive.

"I'll have to risk the row with my people. I'll have to write and tell them—now."

"You would be wiser to wait a few days," said Brother Anselm. "I don't doubt your conviction, but I think you ought to give it a little longer test. In any case I could not receive you into the Catholic

Church for some time yet; you would have to go through the ordinary course of instruction in the Faith first. Now, let me see. . . . Your father suggests the autumn for your journey to England—say two months from now. I could begin instructing you straight away. Under the circumstances, providing of course your conviction perseveres, I think we might receive you into the Church before you go back. When you write, I should tell your people quite openly that it is a matter of conviction and of conscience with you. Shall that be the programme? "

" Yes," said the Cripple.

They were silent on the way back, as they were often silent now. They understood each other. And Brother Anselm understood something then—that the Cripple would go home, at whatever cost, without a murmur.

The same day, in the afternoon, an unexpected visitor arrived at the monastery.

The Cripple was reading in the garden, absorbed. So much so that he did not become aware of the rustling of feet over the grass until the owners of the same discovered their presence by laughing. He started, and looked up to find Brother Anselm standing there with a little person at his side. This little person ran forward gleefully and presented him with a paper bag of something.

" Innocente! . . . where *have* you blown from? "

He remembered her at once—the little peasant-girl of the village in the mountains. She stood by expectantly, watching for him to open the bag. He understood that was the first thing to do; so untwisted the ends and looked inside. The contents

proved to be a sticky conglomeration of large, bright-coloured sweets.

"I say, how topping!" He successfully concealed his alarm at the prospect of eating them. "Are they really all for me? Let's have one each—first round."

For a minute or two the peace of the summer afternoon was disturbed by three sets of molars crunching at rock-like substances, which presently became reduced to the consistency of very firm glue threatening to remove the teeth from their sockets. Innocente won, more accustomed to the business; the Cripple came in second, and Brother Anselm made a bad third, finishing with a series of frantic gulps.

"Now tell me all about it," said the Cripple. "I want to know where Innocente has sprung from."

Brother Anselm acted as interpreter when necessary, the Cripple following the Italian child as best he could. It appeared that her father had taken her down in the cart to the town in the valley for market-day, and he had given her six soldi to spend, and Innocente had seen some most beautiful sweets on one of the stalls in the market-place, and she had given her six soldi to the woman, and the woman had given her a lot of the beautiful sweets, and Innocente had gone into the church, and she had remembered the signore in the "bed," because she always asked the Bambino Gesu in church to make him better, and she had told Gesu that she was going to give the signore the sweets because he was in "bed" and could not go to the woman in the market for sweets, and she had told father when they came out, and father had stopped at the monastery, and he was outside with the horse, and——

"And you are the most wonderful little person in the world!" said the Cripple impulsively, reaching

out for her hand. There was a lump in his throat. He looked into Innocente's eyes—deep wells of perfect purity, wondering at the child's love for him shining there in the clear depths. This mite of seven loved him—because he was a cripple. She was lovely as a little Madonna, with those dark eyes and the olive-white complexion.

Then she told him all about her father and her mother and her brothers and her sisters and the cow and the pigs and her doll. His Italian vocabulary was decidedly limited, but with Brother Anselm's aid a fairly creditable conversation was achieved.

"Look here, we're forgetting father," the monk reminded them. "Come along, young lady!"

Innocente wanted the Cripple to come too. She would push the "bed." Brother Anselm thought perhaps they had better push it together. Beyond occasionally getting mixed up with Brother Anselm's legs, Innocente did her share nobly, informing the Cripple, from somewhere underneath, that she pushed her doll about like this.

The father was waiting at the gates, hat in hand. After greeting the signore and hoping he had not minded the bambina coming to see him, he talked to Brother Anselm and then told Innocente they must start back. She kissed the Cripple good-bye and said she was coming to see him again and bring him more sweets. Brother Anselm lifted her into the cart and they drove off, Innocente waving until they disappeared round the corner.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ATHEIST KNOWS

THERE was no doubt about it. His people had taken it very badly. He had written to them a few days after his talk with Brother Anselm, and now the reply had come.

"... Your mother and I are pained beyond words. . . . I am amazed at the effrontery of this monk. To ensnare you into the Catholic Church is disgraceful in any case; but to take advantage of your helpless condition is beneath contempt. . . . I consider the step you contemplate taking an insult to the honour of your family. The Catholic religion may be all very well for the lower orders and foreigners, but . . ."

There were four pages of this kind of thing. His father seemed to take it as a personal injury. The Cripple's own conviction and conscience in the matter were ignored.

He asked Brother Anselm to read the letter. The monk did so, and then said quite simply: "Pray for them both. At present your father refuses to see that it is a matter of conscience with you. He wants to believe that you have been unduly influenced; he is not going to have it that it comes from yourself. His threat to write to the *Times* and expose me is—well, that's to stop me receiving you into the Church. I'm

sorry he's taken it like this ; I'm afraid it will make going home not quite so easy."

Brother Anselm did not tell the other what he read between the lines—the selfish pride of an irreligious man whose conscience had been stung by his son taking religion seriously. He noticed that the Cripple, though rather sad, had taken it quite calmly. Things like this seemed to matter little to him now. There were other signs too to tell the monk how rapidly he was advancing—the man who, not so long ago, had cursed God ! Since the Benediction in the village the Cripple had asked every day to be taken into the monastery church. He would lie there very quiet facing the Tabernacle on the altar. The inward peace of his soul was manifesting itself in his very bearing. The singular beauty of his face struck Brother Anselm very forcibly at this moment.

"You are being plunged very deep in the crucible," he said. "It is not often God asks so much. He is asking everything from you."

Yes, thought the monk, everything. His body had been broken ; the pleasures of life taken away. There was the complete helplessness, the humiliating dependence on others, the terrible anguish of those times of pain. And now there had come upon him the bitterness and anger of his own people.

"And soon He will ask me for you," said the Cripple with a sad smile.

Brother Anselm took his hand.

"I am only a prop. You will carry on now. You are on the road to Calvary. It is the way He makes His saints."

The Cripple kissed the big, rough hand that held his own, as he had once seen the children in the village do.

Meanwhile the stay of the party at the hotel was drawing to a close. The Major and the other three were leaving for England in two days' time.

Brother Anselm had invited them to meet the Cripple and himself up at the village in the mountains on the day of the conversation just recorded. The rendezvous was to be the caffè terrace after Benediction in the afternoon. It was to be a kind of farewell gathering. He had left it to the Major to ask the Atheist or not, as he thought best. The Major decided not to do so; the man's antagonism towards the monk was still so marked that no good could come of them meeting again. As it happened the Atheist announced his intention in the morning of making a visit by car to one or two places; he would not be back until dinner in the evening. The Major congratulated himself on the way being cleared so easily; there was no need now even to mention the meeting at the caffè. Unfortunately it never occurred to him to ask the Atheist which places he intended to visit.

And so it was that the unforeseen thing happened.

The coffee-and-cakes part was over. The proprietor of the caffè had placed wine upon the table, waiting upon the signori himself. Not every day did a party of Englishmen patronize his terrace.

They were all in a happy mood, in spite of the approaching farewell. The bracing air of the mountains, the view, the good wine and all had an exhilarating effect. Even the Pessimist was laughing at the Major's funny stories—told in his comic, jerky way. The Cripple, as usual, was chaffing the Optimist. . . .

"Keep quiet, you two," called Brother Anselm.

"The Major's got a funny story."

"Weren't the others funny?" said the Cripple.

"Go on, Major."

The Major cleared his throat.

"It was a drawing-room party I was at——"

"Who let you in?" asked the Cripple.

"——it was a drawing-room party I was at. Somebody started competition games, and offered a prize to the person who could make the funniest face. Loud applause. The guests sat round—features screwed up into every conceivable kind of grimace. I was appointed judge, and I went round examining each face in turn. Finally I approached an elderly lady who appeared to be making a remarkably funny face. 'Madam,' I said, 'I award you the prize.' The lady replied in icy tones: 'Sir, I am not playing.' I shall never forget the sensation it——"

"You awful man!" cried the Cripple. "You *awful* man! That one was in *Punch*—years ago."

"Eh? . . . Was it now? Was it really? I must have mixed it up—— Oh well, it was a drawing-room party—— Look here, how on earth can a fellow tell stories——"

He gave it up and joined in the convulsions of laughter.

"Giving a fellow away——"

The Major suddenly stopped. The merriment died out of his face, a heavy frown taking its place. He was staring fixedly at something. The others followed the direction of his eyes; and received a shock too. A car had drawn up at the entrance to the terrace, and someone was getting out.

It was the Atheist.

He walked in through the gates and strolled across to the parapet, standing there to take in the view. He had not noticed them yet; they were in the further corner. There was a minute of suspense, and then he turned round—and saw them.

It was an embarrassing moment.

The Atheist, after the first surprise, recovered himself quickly. But he had grasped the situation in a flash. He had been deliberately left out of all this. It was the monk's doing. . . . His hatred surged up. He was too clever a man to let them notice anything, however. He would not make a fool of himself a second time. He advanced. . . .

The Major decided to make the best of it.

"So you've found us, have you? How's the car going?"

"Splendid, thanks. I ought to have said this morning that I was stopping here on the way back. I thought I'd see the view. I must say it's marvellous—not a bit overrated."

The others breathed more easily. He was taking it nicely after all.

"Have a drink?" said the Major.

"Thanks. Dusty work on the roads."

The Atheist sat down and lit a cigarette, to all appearances completely at his ease. He had taken no notice of Brother Anselm so far. They were sitting some distance apart, the others between them. He talked about his drive in the car and the places he had seen, and then launched on to general subjects. He could talk well when he chose. He was obviously choosing to do so now.

Brother Anselm watched him. Why had he stayed? He could quite easily have made some excuse for

continuing his journey. The monk's intuition told him there was some scheme working in that busy brain; the Atheist was playing for time. He was talking for a purpose; he was setting himself to gain the interest and sympathy of the others.

They were listening now to his opinions on certain political questions. Brother Anselm began to understand the man's peculiar power—that power he had exercised for a time over the Cripple. There was a compelling fascination about him—like this.

They had entered upon the subject of the War, the sacrifice of life involved, and finally, for some reason or other, the dishonour of those who refused to hear their country's call. . . .

Then Brother Anselm began to see. Without appearing to do so the Atheist was deliberately steering the conversation. Towards what? . . .

“Those who went through the War——”

The Atheist paused, and then repeated louder :

“Those who went through it all were filled with just contempt for the cowards who refused to serve in such a cause until practically compelled to do so. It is scarcely conceivable that there were Englishmen so lost to all sense of shame as to proffer any excuse to save their skins. Unfortunately they managed to make their excuses sound so plausible as to conceal the fact that they were despicable shirkers. Don't you agree with me, Major?”

“There were some, I've no doubt,” replied the Major, wondering why the Atheist was emphasizing the point so. His remarks seemed forced—and unnecessary, considering that they had all served in the War.

“There were even those who sheltered themselves

behind religion," continued the other, "claiming exemption on the ground of their religious duties. These skulkers should have been combed out like the rest—men who professed to serve the highest interests of humanity, and when it came to the test, hid themselves away in the hour of humanity's need. They may have congratulated themselves; but they lost the respect of all who did their bit out there."

"I don't quite know whom you are referring to," said the Major, "but there were priests enough at the front. I had the greatest respect for their work. I know for a fact that they gave their lives again and again in the course of their duties. Anyway—What do you think is behind this business in China?"

"I am not alluding to the ones who were out there," said the other, refusing to be put off. "I am alluding to those who were not. What were the Religious Orders doing?"

"Sending out their priests too," quickly answered the Major. "Some had to stay behind, I take it, to carry on the ordinary jobs."

The Atheist hesitated for a moment—feeling his way. The others were looking bewildered, unable to perceive what he was driving at. Then it came:

"Those who stayed behind, shut up in their monasteries, forfeited all right to talk about a God of love. Those of us who went through that hell are the ones to judge——"

"May I suggest," said Brother Anselm, "that instead of addressing your remarks *at* me, you address them *to* me."

The Atheist had been waiting for this. He had struck home at last. He was on sure ground now. The monk, he had guessed, had not served in the War.

He had never alluded to it. Not only this, but his continued silence under the deliberately provoking remarks spoke louder than any words. The challenge of course was mere bravado. It contained the monk's virtual admittance that he had stayed behind. The Major knew it and was shielding him.

"Certainly," he answered confidently, "if you wish it; though I should have thought you would have preferred not to draw attention to yourself—under the circumstances."

The Major started. It had come to him in a flash that he had never told the other even that Brother Anselm had been in the army.

"Certainly," repeated the Atheist. "I will do as you wish. You had the impertinence to address your insulting remarks to me the other——"

"Look here, chuck it!" interposed the Major. "It was a different matter then. He caught you at an underhanded game, and told you exactly what he thought of——"

"And *I* am going to tell *him* exactly what I think of him. There's no occasion for you to interfere, Major." He turned to the monk. "My opinion of you is my opinion of all monks who hid themselves away instead of taking their place at the front. You were a cowardly pack of shirkers! . . . I suppose it was the will of your God that you should keep out of it! I always thought religion was a soft sort of thing."

Brother Anselm said nothing.

His silence was perplexing the others to the verge of exasperation. The Cripple had been about to interrupt; but a warning glance from the monk had checked him—and the others too. They were all on

the point of breaking in. Why didn't he speak—say that he had been through the War? He was making no attempt to defend himself. Instead he was gazing calmly at the view in front.

"You are not merely shirkers, you are hypocrites too, you people!" The Atheist was determined to lash the monk out of what he thought was an assumed indifference to conceal his chagrin. "The other day you preached at me; you dared to vaunt your pretensions of serving others for the love of God. You do it! You had chance enough in the War. Why didn't you come out there and do things for the love of God? The religion of you monks is what I always thought it—a canting, selfish sham; white-washed hypocrisy!"

Brother Anselm remained impassive.

"The love of God! There is *no such thing* as the love of God. Religion is so much snivelling self-interest, when it's put to the test of——"

"Damn it all! I *must* speak . . . I *must*," the Major burst out. He could hold himself in no longer. He looked appealingly at the monk.

Brother Anselm slowly rose. . . .

"I must go and settle up at the caffè."

He was coming to some decision.

"Yes, Major, you may speak now." Then he bent down and said in an undertone: "And—I release you from that promise."

He walked across the terrace and passed through the entrance into the caffè.

The Atheist was watching the Major. There was a sudden fear behind his defiant expression; the monk's abrupt disappearance had completely baffled him. The others were in a state of tension.

The Major moved his chair so as to face him squarely. He drew a deep breath. . . .

"So you called him a cowardly shirker! A cowardly shirker! . . ." He said each word slowly. "You were hoping your slanders would turn us against him.—Yes, I said 'slanders.' You knew in any case that Brother Anselm was not what you called him. Do you imagine we should think one shade the less of him even if he had never been out there?—Yes, I said 'even if he had never been out there.' Cowardly shirkers don't do what he's done for—" He looked towards the ambulance. "Even if he had been shut up in the monastery—well, that's his job, not yours. As it happens though, he was not. Make sure of your target; you got a bit wide of it this time. I'm going to tell you something. Brother Anselm was not a monk during the War; he was still practising as a doctor. He served in the British Army as M.O. He was with the gunners—attached to a certain battery. And that battery was mine. . . ."

The Atheist looked as if he had been struck. Defiance gave place to stupefaction. He parried.

"I—I don't believe it. I was in your battery. I—I should have remembered him."

"Yes, you *should* have. A pity you did not! You were with us for a few weeks. It was long enough for him to remember you; and short enough for you to forget him, it seems. He knew you, my friend, when he saw you again. You see, it was rather unlikely that he would forget you."

The Major looked round at the others, as if to prepare them for something—and then back at the Atheist.

"Would you like to know why? Do you remember asking me a certain question, and I told you I couldn't

answer it because I was bound by a promise not to ? ”

The other suddenly sat up rigid, his mouth open.

“ I have just been released from that promise,” said the Major.

He bent forward.

“ You asked me who saved your life at the front.
. . . It was Brother Anselm who saved your life.”

The Major folded his arms and sat back.

It had come as a thunderbolt—well-nigh electrifying every man of them. The dénouement was so abrupt that the others remained speechless, scarcely able to credit what they heard,

“ And you called him a cowardly shirker ! ”

“ I—I don’t bel——”

The words died on his lips. It was useless. The Major’s statement was that of a man who knew the truth of what he was saying. The Atheist recognized it—the play of his face revealing his reluctance to do so. He had gone deadly white. He made one more futile attempt to refuse the unpalatable fact. Then his body relaxed, and he sat there with his shoulders drooping as under the effects of a blow.

“ It may not be convenient to believe it—that’s what you mean. I daresay not. And please don’t imagine Brother Anselm told me this himself—of his own accord. It may interest you to learn that I guessed it, before I got it out of him. When I find that you are left behind at night amongst the corpses on a hell-spot—you remember that ridge well enough, that wipe-out—and when I find that a man is seen going back to that hell-spot, and when I find that two hours later the same man reaches the dressing-station with you in a state of delirium and himself pretty well

kno. ked-out—when I find out things like that, I begin to guess. And when I discover one or two other little things—like his starting on a horse and coming back without one, and shell-spinters being taken out of him, and four weeks at a C.C.S.—when I discover things like this, I come to the conclusion that this ‘cowardly shirker’ not merely saved your life, but went through hell to do it.”

The Atheist was breathing heavily. He shifted his position.

“Four weeks after that night the Doc turned up from the C.C.S., the marks of what he’d been through still upon him. I challenged him to deny what I knew he had done—gone and got you back. He admitted it, but bound me by promise not to tell a living soul. I could get very little out of him; he refused to talk about it. But I know this much; what he did would have been mighty difficult for most of us. There’s something somewhere, isn’t there, about loving your enemies? Not an easy thing to do. But if ever it was done—well, I reckon it was done that night——”

He stopped. He had caught sight of Brother Anselm returning. The others saw him too.

As he came near, they stood up—spontaneously.

“No, no—please,” said Brother Anselm. It seemed to distress him. They sat down again. He put away the Cripple’s hand, held out to him. This kind of thing was obviously painful. He was not thinking of himself. All his thoughts were on the Atheist. He had not risen with the others, but remained in his chair. And he remained there now, his head down, waiting. . . .

Brother Anselm stood with his arms folded, looking down upon the man who had vilified him. The Cripple was leaning forward from his ambulance, his eyes

shining with unashamed admiration. Opposite, on the other side, sat the Major upright, gnawing impatiently at his moustache, obviously hoping to see that slanderer receive his due. The two others, also upright, were wondering why the monk was looking at him like that.

The cry of a bird was borne up from the gulf in the rocks beneath. No other sound broke in upon the group waiting there on the terrace—waiting for the lash to descend.

But no lash came.

Instead, a great longing crept into the monk's look. There was no need for him to ask what the Major had said. It was written there in every line of that defeated figure.

He knew now.

When at last Brother Anselm spoke, his voice was full of pity.

"I am sorry for you. I let him tell you because—well, you said that our religion was a selfish thing—self-interest. You said that there was no such thing as the love of God. . . . Do you know why I did it?"

Silence. The Atheist was staring in front of him, not looking at the monk.

"I did it for the love of God. I don't think there was very much self-interest in it; there hardly could have been under the circumstances. You see, I could not leave you to die there, knowing you for what you were—your life and all. I hope you don't mind my saying this; but, if I had not loved God enough to do it, I don't know that I could have done it at all. Can you bring yourself to believe that; that it *was* done for the love of God?"

Silence.

"When we do things that are not easy, we do them for God. It is part of our religion. You are here to-day—you owe your life to our religion. Won't you think a little more gently of——?"

Brother Anselm did not finish the sentence. The Atheist had raised his eyes and met his own. It was only for a moment. Then he stared again in front of him with eyes narrowing into black slits, his mouth set in a hard straight line. He was repressing, refusing, driving down something fiercely—something that was striving for the upper hand. . . .

The monk shivered.

An intangible fear passed over him, a horror of some terrible thing. Unconsciously he moved away slightly, as from an evil presence. His heart was sinking with dread. He could say nothing more to that rigid, impenetrable figure.

The Angelus bell broke in upon them from the village church.

Brother Anselm crossed himself, repeating the words in a whisper. The dread left him. That bell, however, and the monk's prayer had another effect on the Atheist—an effect so malevolent that even the Major shrank back amazed. Some raging malignity had surged up, distorting the hard set of his face into an expression of fiendish malice.

"For God's sake, man, don't!" burst out the monk. "For God's sake! . . . Are you mad? Are you going to damn your soul to hell?"

"*Hell?*"—echoed back from the cliffs.

The Atheist stood up.

He stared insolently at the monk. He moved away, pushed back his chair—and stared again. An ugly, mocking peal of laughter broke from his lips. . . .

And then, without a word, he left them.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CRIPPLE TESTED

§ I

IT was autumn.

Two months had passed, all too quickly for the Cripple. A week more, and he would be making his journey to England. The Major and the others had said farewell two days after the affair at the caffè. The dramatic culmination of matters between Brother Anselm and the Atheist had relieved them of the latter's company; for on their return to the hotel afterwards, it was found that the Atheist had already left—evidently wishing to avoid them. He was not seen again.

He had vanished from their lives.

The Major had written from London later on to say that he would like to superintend the Cripple's journey himself—he was “used to transport work.” He would come back a week before the date fixed. That morning he had arrived, to be duly ensconced in one of the monastery guest-rooms, Brother Anselm having refused to hear of him stopping at the hotel. Two male nurses—“keepers” the Cripple called them—were following.

The Cripple was now a Catholic. He had been received into the Church by Brother Anselm the

previous morning, and had made his first Communion immediately afterwards. That ineffable experience coupled with the sacramental absolution preceding it had left him quite bewildered by the love of God—the God Whom four months ago he had cursed ! Who had saved him from suicide by the almost miraculous intervention of His monk.

He lay there now in the garden he had learned to love so well ; his garden of peace. He had watched its trees clothing themselves with the full green of summer and then mellowing into the golden yellow of their autumn glow. To-day the garden seemed very wonderful—a garden of God. His very breath stirred the leaves and rustled in the tree-tops ; His voice was in the tinkling stream and in the song of birds ; every sunbeam was gilded with His glory. The very leaves were falling at His touch.

But God was not merely without and about him now. He was present to him, in his soul, in his innermost being. That was what the Catholic Church had done—placed him in personal relationship with a Person. She had given him a direct spiritual experience of God. His submission to the Church had proved to be as Brother Anselm had said, submission to God. He had become as a child and entered the Kingdom of Heaven. He was in the arms of a mighty Mother, whose strength was the strength of God. His very life pulsed through the veins of her body. At the touch of her fingers Divine graces poured into his soul. And his whole impulsive, generous nature was responding to the God of love as harp-strings to the human hand.

And so there was music in his soul and gladness in his eyes as he lay there in the garden that autumn day amidst the falling leaves. Leaves of brown,

yellow leaves, leaves tinged with red—he watched them zig-zagging downwards until they rested with a sigh upon the earth, wondering what the garden would look like when all the trees were bared. To his quickened imagination this slow stripping of the trees seemed symbolical of his own life. He was being slowly stripped of everything. It would be Brother Anselm next. He hardly dared to think of that. For he loved that great rough, masterful man who had cared for him like a mother; who sacrificed himself for others and hated it to be known. He would never forget him apologizing for letting the Major tell them what he had done—"I'm sorry, my dears. I don't think I've ever hated myself so much. I did it because I thought it might change him, if he knew. And—and I've failed." And then before them all he had buried his head in his arms, and cried his big heart out for the soul he had tried to save.

There was little Innocente too. The child had woven herself into his life in a strange way. She had come to see him many times—every market-day in fact. He had polished up his Italian with Brother Anselm's aid, and their talks had progressed famously. Innocente knew now that he would always be "like that in bed." She had asked him one day when he would be able to "run about" with her, and he had explained why he would never be able to run about. She had been very unhappy about it until Brother Anselm told her that the Cripple was one of God's "chosen ones." Then she had looked almost enviously at him and asked Brother Anselm if she could be a "chosen one" too.

To-day he would see her for the last time. She was coming to say good-bye

§ 2

It was three o'clock ; the hour at which Innocente generally arrived.

The Cripple was at the gates ; Brother Anselm and the Major strolling up and down the gravel-drive near by. He had not long to wait before the market-cart came in sight, climbing slowly up the hill. Innocente saw him and waved. Her father raised his hat.

As the cart came near, he could see that she had brought the doll to say good-bye too, and a bunch of flowers—for himself he guessed. She was wearing her blue "market-frock." At the gates her father climbed out and lifted her down. The Cripple raised himself to prepare for the usual effusive greeting. But Innocente, instead of coming straight to him, ran across to the other side of the road. She had seen some flower on the bank and wanted to pick it. The father advanced and greeted him, as Brother Anselm and the Major came up.

It was at that moment that a car—a large touring-car—came round the corner unnoticed by them, running swiftly and silently down the hill.

And then the thing happened. . . .

It happened with a terrible suddenness. It happened before their eyes. For, as the car came level with the gates, its whirr caused them to look towards the road. Innocente was skipping across, holding up her bunch of flowers for the Cripple to see. The driver of the car had his eye on the horse and cart, and did not notice her. He heard them shout. There was a screeching of brakes. . . .

It was too late. The car had caught that little danc-

ing figure and flung it aside. . . . For a few seconds things seemed to stand still. A sickening sensation gripped the Cripple. He closed his eyes. . . .

He opened them slowly. Brother Anselm was across there. He was on one knee, bending over something—over a twisted little heap. The Major was there too, bending over, and the father with his hand over his eyes. He saw the Major look up sharply and say something to the driver of the car, who was waving his hands about and trying to explain. He kept quiet then. Next, the Major was taking off his coat. Brother Anselm took it and very slowly began to work it under what the Cripple now began to realize was Innocente's body.

When that was done, Brother Anselm lifted the burden in his arms. The Major stood aside to let him pass. He was coming through the gates. As he passed, the Cripple looked. He saw two little legs dangling in a helpless sort of way—no more. The father followed behind with his head down, his face drawn and haggard.

The Major stayed a moment to pick up the doll which was lying in the middle of the road, and collect the flowers scattered about. He hesitated, glanced towards the Cripple, and came across. Without meeting his eyes he laid the doll on the ambulance and put the flowers into his hand.

He started after the others. Something, however, occurred to him ; for he came back, turned the ambulance round and wheeled the Cripple down the drive to the entrance of the monastery. Neither of them spoke.

The Major went inside.

The Cripple looked at the flowers. . . .

And then it was that the horror of what had happened broke upon him. Innocente had been—— No, it couldn't be that! He shuddered. He tried not to think. . . .

Then, all in a moment, a tempestuous fury was raging at his soul—striving to lash him to revolt; to deny; to hate! Snatches from the Atheist's arguments dinned in his ears. He felt his faith being torn at by unseen hands—derided by mocking lips. He clung on with his will. . . . "Oh, my God!—My God!" He fought it down. The fury abated. He became calm again.

One of the monks came out and walked quickly towards the gate, where the driver was pacing up and down. He spoke to him. The man went to his car, backed and turned, and drove away up the hill. He had gone to fetch the mother from the village in the mountains, the Cripple learnt later.

A long half-hour of suspense.

And then he heard footsteps inside and a latch clicking. The door opened and Brother Anselm came out. The Major and one of the other monks were with him, but stayed within the doorway.

Brother Anselm came to the Cripple. There was a dark stain all down his habit.

"You would rather I told you?"

"Y—es. Yes, tell me."

"She is conscious now; but she is dying. I don't think she can last very long; perhaps an hour or two. Would you like to be taken in—to be with her?"

"Yes—I want to," the Cripple replied hoarsely.

"She has received absolution and been anointed. I am going to give her Viaticum, if possible—now."

He added: "She knows nothing of what has happened. She wants to give you some flowers—and cannot find them. Let her see that you have them."

He spoke to the Major, and then went inside again with the other monk. The Major came and turned the ambulance, and wheeled the Cripple inside through the doorway, down the main corridor. He stopped at a door on the left and opened it. The Cripple noticed a smell of chemicals. He found himself inside a large room. A sense of stillness struck him. In the middle of the room there was a large table, at the further side of which a man, the father, was sitting. He looked up as they entered, his eyes returning almost immediately to their vigil. In a corner was a basin containing pieces of blue frock. The Major moved the ambulance alongside the table.

The Cripple looked.

In the centre, on a mattress and wrapped in a blanket, lay a small figure. The head was heavily bandaged. Beneath the bandaging a little white face appeared. The eyes were closed. The Cripple could hardly realize it was Innocentè. The waxen pallor made her look different. She seemed far away. There was something about the arranging of the blanket which spoke of terrible injury. She was moaning now—and freeing her arm, as if trying to find something.

The father rose and came round the table. He took the child's hand gently and placed it in the Cripple's. Her eyelids flickered and opened. She looked about her and, as her eyes rested on him, a faint light came into them. He showed her the bunch of flowers.

The tinkling of a bell became audible. As the sound came nearer, the father knelt down. The door opened

and a monk entered—then Brother Anselm carrying Something under a veil. The first monk lit two candles, placing them on a table at the side, and knelt down. The Major knelt down too—rather awkwardly. Brother Anselm was reciting some Latin words, the other monk responding. There were genuflections, and then they were bending over Innocente, the one holding a white cloth under her chin as Brother Anselm placed the Host on her tongue. They watched for a minute, then went back to the table at the side. The rite completed, Brother Anselm made the sign of the Cross with What he was holding under the veil. . . . They were gone.

The tinkling of the bell died away in the distance, and stillness reigned once more. The room was different now to the Cripple. The stillness was full of a tremendous Presence—filled with a vast, overwhelming Love. The sharp sword of agony had been placed in its sheath. He became aware that the horror of it had gone, at the touch of a mighty Hand. It was as if Someone had taken that babe into His arms and said: "You may leave all the rest to Me."

Brother Anselm was back.

He drew a chair up to the table, sitting close. He was leaning over, whispering some words. The Cripple caught the Holy Name. She was repeating it after him faintly. Now he was holding a crucifix to her lips. He placed it where she could see it; then sprinkled Holy Water.

They watched in silence.

The moaning began again—and stopped rather suddenly. Her eyes opened, slowly and wearily. She

was trying to say something. Brother Anselm bent over to catch the words. . . .

"She is 'very, very tired,'" he repeated to them.

He was listening again. . . . He looked up at the Cripple.

"When she sees God, she is going to tell Him about you."

The Cripple took the little hand in his own.

Brother Anselm began to recite some more prayers.

It was now that the Cripple understood what was happening in this room. He saw the table in the middle as a kind of altar on which Innocente was being offered. She had been asked of them ; they were giving her back. The human anguish of it all was there, in his heart, in the tears that had brimmed over and were running down his cheeks—yes. But that anguish was almost swallowed up in the knowledge born of faith ; that, if they loved Innocente, there was Someone Who loved her immeasurably more ; Someone Whose everlasting arms were reaching down to take her to Himself ; Someone Who had created her, to Whom she belonged, to Whom she was returning ; Someone Who had agonized and offered Himself that she might be with Him eternally. That little figure in the blanket meant infinitely more to Him than it ever'could to them. Eternal Love was waiting.

A change was coming.

She had lapsed now into unconsciousness. Brother Anselm's fingers were on her wrist. They could see a shadow stealing over. . . .

There was a pause.

Outside in the grounds a bird chirruped—the sound

of it accentuated in that living silence. A great peace seemed to radiate from the centre, from where Innocente lay.

The western sun had crept round the trees of the garden. Rays of golden light were flooding into the room, beyond where the table stood.

Brother Anselm was on his knees as the breathing altered. The foremost ray had reached the table. . . . It was climbing slowly, over the bandages on the head. . . .

A long sigh came—the sigh of a tired child settling down to sleep. The golden glory was moving onwards . . . over the face . . . touching the mouth. . . .

The baby lips were parted in a kind of wondering smile.

She was dead.

CHAPTER XV

THE MAJOR IS MYSTIFIED

THE cat rubbed round the Major's legs, by way of inviting him to continue that very pleasant tickling on the top of its head. The Major however did not respond this time.

He had been walking up and down in the dark on the path that ran alongside the monastery church, listening to the last chants of the monks' Vespers. A bell in the tower had boomed forth good-night over the garden and down into the valley. Once he had heard the door round the corner open, and shut ; then the crunch of gravel, followed later by the sound of wheels on the road—the dead child's father and mother departing for the night. And the hush of the star-lit heavens had descended once more.

He had lighted a cigarette, the cat seizing her opportunity of securing his attentions. He was standing still now, unresponsive to the creature's wiles, wondering why the great windows above him still glowed faintly from some light within. He could hear nothing. There was no more singing. . . . He threw down his cigarette. The cat sprang aside from the sparks, and walked off—insulted.

There was a side door at the end of the path. He would discover whether it was still open. He had never seen the church inside. . . . Yes, the door gave

at his push. He was within. A smell of stale incense greeted him.

His first impression was of a forest of pillars, soaring upwards into darkness—bars of black interspaced with light from behind. The source of this light was concealed from his view. He crept clear of the shadows until the long length of the nave opened out.

Then he saw something which riveted his attention—something which was to impress itself indelibly on his memory. . . .

In the centre, at the further end of the nave facing the entrance to the choir, lay the Cripple in his ambulance—motionless. As motionless as that which was before him. For beyond the ambulance stood a small coffin covered with a white pall. On either side there were candles burning, their dancing flames emphasizing the immobility around. Beyond the coffin again, and far above in the dimness, a great crucifix was hanging, the figure of the Christ caught by the candle-light from below. It was only his fancy perhaps, but from where the Major stood the Christ seemed to be looking directly down upon the Cripple and the coffin.

He was not an imaginative man ; but, as he watched, the impression was borne upon him of some kind of relationship between these three. It may have been that the candle-light had grouped them together out of the surrounding darkness, merely associating them to his own sight. But certainly the impression was very vivid. It was almost as if there was a conversation going on between them. Yes—an intimate conversation.

The Major felt a little uncomfortable. He wondered whether he ought to be looking on. A sense almost of guilt came over him ; of having stumbled upon something not meant to be seen.

There *was* something going on there. . . .

He looked towards the door at which he had entered, and began to creep away on tip-toe. Just before the pillars would have hidden the nave from sight he glanced back. He stopped. Someone was coming out of the darkness down the choir into the circle of light. . . .

It was Brother Anselm. He was passing the coffin, and approaching the Cripple to speak to him.

The Major saw the monk stand still—and then draw back a little. He had apparently noticed something unusual. He was hesitating. He went up to the ambulance and touched the other on the shoulder. . . .

The Cripple did not move.

Brother Anselm touched him again. . . . Still he did not move.

The Major began to feel afraid. Had anything happened? He had better make his presence known. He turned back and walked cautiously up the nave. Half-way he paused. Brother Anselm was kneeling down, looking upwards at the crucifix.

The Major felt reassured, but rather at a loss; not quite liking to disturb the monk. He must wait. It was certainly very perplexing; but there could not be anything seriously wrong. Brother Anselm appeared to be taking whatever it was quite calmly.

It seemed rather out of place to be standing there staring. The Major, though not exactly a religious man, felt he ought to do something religious. He knelt down.

After a few minutes Brother Anselm rose, looked once more at the Cripple, and then came down the nave to where the Major was kneeling. He showed no surprise at seeing him. He must have known all the

time that he was there. The Major stood up. Brother Anselm smiled. He was wiping his cheeks ; they were all wet. He led him to the door.

Outside, the Major burst out :

" What's the matter ? Why's he like that ? Looks queer to me ! "

Brother Anselm linked arms without answering and walked him up and down in the dark. Then he halted, facing him, and put both hands on his shoulders.

" Dear old Major ! It's rather difficult to explain. If you were a Catholic it would be different. I mean, you would understand then. "

The Major looked perplexed.

" But is he all right ? "

" Yes, quite. The good God is looking after him. He is—— Well, it's a way God has with His chosen ones. " Brother Anselm knew it would be no good telling him what was really happening to the Cripple.

The Major looked more mystified than ever.

" Darned queer thing—your religion ! "

" Never mind, " said the monk. " You see, Major, he is rather a wonderful person ; although he doesn't know it. He is going to be a saint, I think. Everything is being taken from him—to-day Innocente. That is the way God makes His saints ; by taking everything from them. He loved that little child ; but he never questioned, in spite of what it cost. He loves God more. Do you know what he said to me after it was all over ?—— "

The Major shook his head, without speaking.

"——' I wanted to give something—so I've given Him Innocente. Don't you think she's rather a beautiful gift ? ' "

Brother Anselm moved towards the door as he added :

"We made that little coffin so that she could be in the church to-night. When everything was finished he asked where she would be. I told him—under the crucifix. He asked if he could be there with her. That is why he is there now. I must go back."

He opened the door and went inside.

The Major blew his nose. . . .

A pair of gleaming eyeballs appeared from out of the darkness. Their owner began to squirm round his legs.

"Hullo, cat ; so you've turned up again ! "

The cat found herself picked up. She began to purr—doubtfully at first, and then louder. Perhaps he had not thrown that cigarette at her after all. . . . Suddenly she found herself returned to the ground.

"Damn it all ! . . ."

The Major blew his nose again.

The following has been pieced together from a letter written by Brother Anselm to a priest in England, into whose care he was committing the Cripple.

It appears that the Cripple remained in his motionless state for about half an hour ; also that during this period he was entirely insensible to outer things. The monk remarks on " the peaceful intentness of his face, touched with a peculiar radiancy." Elsewhere he says : " When he came to himself again, it was as if he were awakening from sleep. Beyond being a little confused and absent-minded, he seemed quite normal."

The letter does not make it quite clear as to when the Cripple related his experience to Brother Anselm, but, from certain indications, we gather that it was two or three days later.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CRIPPLE'S VISION

. . . It was to the Cripple as if a door were being closed upon the world of sense. The white-draped coffin before him was becoming remote. He was aware of sinking away from outer things into an ineffable peace within—into a Presence that surged all round. At first he was conscious of an amazing sweetness, of Love penetrating his inmost being, of his own love meeting and mingling with that Love.

He remained resting in this peace, desiring nothing more, seeking nothing more. He waited.

Then it came. . . .

There appeared before him something so terrible, that, but for a strength which was not his own and which now came to him, his soul would have cried out for release from the sight.

It was the Crucified straining in agony on the Cross—the Body running with blood from the head and hands and feet, the face bruised and marred, every nerve quivering with pain, the whole frame racked with torture.

And this was but a part of what he saw.

There was something more; and before the terror of it the physical anguish seemed almost to pale away.

The Crucified was now immersed in a dense blackness—in the horror of a great darkness that surrounded and covered, that crushed with an overwhelming pressure. A darkness not like that of the night. An evil darkness: a vivid, living intensity of everything evil, of everything vile and unholy; malignant, vibrant through and through with hatred and malice. It enveloped the One Who hung there, isolated Him in abject loneliness, clutched Him in cruel embrace—concentrating upon His Person all the forces of Hell, all the Satanic powers, all the world's hate. There was no help, no relief from its foul, gripping fingers. The Crucified was nailed there at its mercy—and no mercy came.

It was Sin.

From out of the blackness came a cry: *Eloi, Eloi, lamma sabacthani?* And in that cry was contained the supremity of all suffering; of the God-Man's agony for man—for love of man. And no man could understand, but only God Who hung there and endured

The Cross became clear to him once more. Beneath it were Innocente and himself. Something was happening. . . . For an infinitesimal space of time Innocente, and then himself for a longer space, were there upon the Cross, being touched with its pain—but only touched.

He understood.

It was what had happened to them. It was their share of the Cross. And it was as nought before that which he had seen.

A torrent of love swept through his being. Again he rested in that innermost peace, seeing nothing, hearing nothing—only knowing. . . .

He saw again.

A vast sphere appeared. So vast as to seem more than his vision could take in. He perceived it as being immeasurably greater than space and time, exceeding the whole natural order of things, expanding outwards and upwards until lost in fathomless heights above.

Beneath the immensity of this sphere at the centre of its curvature there was a small dark object on which the sphere seemed to rest. The dark object was not sustaining the sphere. Rather, the sphere was touching it to give access to itself ; for, at the point of junction, entrance could be gained.

The understanding of it came to him.

The sphere was the Catholic Church. The dark object was the world. Its darkness was that of a heavy shadow. He saw it as the shadow of pain and suffering and sin. There was but one means of escape, one only, from the gloom and misery of it—through the entrance

into the sphere. The shadow lay within the sphere as well ; yet there it was different. It was luminous, like a mist through which the sun is shining. The gloom of it was gone.

He looked—and at the centre the mist was dispersing.

A glory was breaking through, piercing the obscurity, pouring forth transplendency as it came.

This glory grew, soaring downwards to the depths, upwards to the heights, and across the sphere from breadth to breadth, in the form of four great beams. It was the Cross. And on its beams was stretched the Christ—no longer veiled in darkness. The Figure was ablaze. It was Christ conquering, Christ reigning from the Cross, Christ radiating life.

For from the Cross streamed seven mighty rivers, seven rivers of life, seven rivers of grace—their waters filling the spaces of the sphere, flowing to the uttermost ends.

He saw them as the seven Sacraments of God.

And he saw the sphere in another manner now—as, in a mystical way, the Body of Christ. The vastness of it was full with living beings, members of His Body. They drank of those rivers of life. For them the Crucified had agonized ; offered Himself in death—to release those seven floods, that they might drink and live.

And yet, for all the glory of Cross, the shadow was still there within the sphere, the shadow of pain and suffering and sin ; but luminous and quivering with Love. For the rivers gave release from the darkness of sin ; transformed the suffering and pain for the purifying of the sufferers, drawing to the Cross all who drank, so that He Who hung there suffered with them and they with Him, He in them and they

in Him. They were suffering to be made like Himself.

As he contemplated the mystery, a volume of infinite pleading seemed to be sweeping up from the Cross, carrying with it all the sufferings of Christ and His members as an intense prayer into the blazing heights of light above; and the flood-gates of Divine pity opening, deluging down in torrents of love upon all who suffered and sinned, filling the sphere and overflowing upon those in the darkness of the world without—that they too might be drawn within.

So did he perceive that no suffering was lost, that pain was not in vain. So also did he perceive the reason of the sphere's magnitude, and of the world's littleness. It was the sphere that mattered: the world mattered not. It was being within the sphere that mattered—the one thing that mattered. It mattered eternally. To be without was to be away from all things; from the Cross, from the Crucified, from the Light, from the Truth. Without was the shadow of death. Within was the grandeur of Life.

The vision of it passed.

Again he rested in that innermost peace, seeing nothing, hearing nothing—only knowing. . . .

It came.

It came as the dawn of morning, as a sun rising. It grew and increased—a flaming splendour such as no earthly day had ever known, or ever could know.

There came upon him a blindness. Three times he tried to see. Three times the blindness returned. And he knew that of himself he could not look upon that glory; that no man could.

He was still. . . .

His eyes were opened, and he saw. He saw it in imagery :

The sphere was still there, in dim outline. There was no shadow now inside to accentuate the immensity of its curve. It was all white with the whiteness of translucent light, the whiteness of that blinding splendour ; all depths of crystal transparency, aglow from That which was within. For at the centre, encircled in an infinite glory of His own, was One Who had hung upon a Cross, the King of heaven and earth, Creator of all that is—the God Who was crucified by His creatures, Who gave His life to save—His hands and feet and side a blaze of glorious wounds. There were Two besides. And yet the Three were One. . . .

The seven rivers flowed no more. Their work was done. The reason of it lay revealed within the sphere. Its glowing transparency was that of the mystical Body, now glorified. Its members lived no longer by the rivers, but by their oneness with Eternal Life. He, Who was in the midst, was in the whole, living within those countless millions, pervading their being through and through with His own Being as with the radiance of molten light. His light was the whiteness of the sphere, His purity its crystal clearness, His love its lambent flames.

Host upon host, legion upon legion, myriad upon myriad, they could be seen. No man could number them. From measureless spaces they gazed and loved, contemplating the Infinite. And here was a mystery : that they each of them saw Him face to face ; they each possessed Him for themselves ; they each knew Him as He knew them. And this not of themselves—for that were more than they could bear ; but by the power He gave them.

They were absorbed ; ceaselessly active. They knew no weariness ; nor could they ever know it, knowing Him. They desired no more ; nor could ever desire more. All they aspired to, all that they sought was there in His depthless Being. Nor could they turn away their gaze ; there was nought to see but Himself. Nor sin any more, looking into Eyes as a flame of fire. They were deified, sharing His Nature by grace.

All that had been was as if it had not been. All tears had been wiped from their eyes. No suffering touched them ; nothing could harm, no sorrow come, no shadow of death cross their pathway. The former things had passed away. Yet, they were glad those things had been ; for thereby they were tried, and not found wanting. Thereby they were crowned with Life.

Their bodies too were glorified.

—Some had been broken and twisted ; weakly, decrepit, decayed ; sightless or speechless, bed-ridden, racked with disease, insane. Some had been ugly and loathsome, leprous with festering sores ; or vulgar and common and dirty, reeking with vermin and filth ; drunkards, gin-sodden prostitutes, drug-maniacs, criminals, thieves—they had broken from fetters of vice and shame, allured by the spell of the Cross. Some there were had been murdered—they were there with their murderers too, who in tears and Blood had found mercy, absolved at the gates of death. Some had suffered and died as babes—to be beatified, raised from the pangs of a moment to sudden, endless bliss. Some had been torn to pieces, drawn, quartered, burnt alive—all for the love of a Saviour Whom the world ever crucified. Theirs was a greater glory—their wounds were ablaze like His own.—

Their bodies were all made perfect now, aureoled

with heaven's own light, resplendent with the beauty that shines from stars in the night. They could pass with the swiftness of lightning, to and fro from space to space. There was nothing to hinder or hold them, nothing to mar or maim, nothing to tarnish their glory, nothing to hurt or pain.

There were others, great hosts—His angels, ranged by celestial might, spanning the central spaces, armies on armies of light.

There was one who had stood at the foot of the Cross to be pierced by a sharp-edged sword—for giving the world a Saviour. She was crowned with a crown of twelve stars.

There was silence in heaven it seemed, for a time. . . . Then a Voice from eternity came: *I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and End.* It rolled from abyss to abyss. . . .

From the heights and the depths and the breadths thundered back, pealing from end to end: *Thou wast and Thou art and Thou art to come.* . . .

And everything faded away. . . .

Once more he sank into that innermost peace, seeing nothing, hearing nothing. . . .

He was coming back from some deep place, to the surface of things. The outer world was returning. . . .

The Cripple opened his eyes on a little white-draped coffin, round which the candle-flames still flickered. Someone was kneeling within the circle of their light. It was Brother Anselm.

At the end of his letter Brother Anselm says :

" He related the mystical experience described after I had asked him to do so, and then only with reluctance and the utmost humility. He told it all in that boyish, lovable way of his—shyly, half afraid to do so. As I listened it came to me that his love for God was a very tremendous thing. He seems, in an incredibly short time, to have been raised to a very high state of prayer. I can only account for this by supposing that his utter self-surrender has called forth rivers of grace.

" I have, at times, found it almost more than I could bear to look upon his broken body. I have even had to turn away from those sunken eyes, lest he should see their pathos reflected in my own ; for his life is now a living death. But to-day, as we talked, I began to understand that his helplessness, his pain, his loss of everything are no longer his anguish, but his glory ; that, although he would gladly have gone with Innocente, yet he would rather offer his living death than his life in death before the time.

" It is, I think, the hardest thing I have ever had to do—to let him go. And, when he has gone, I know that everything here will still speak to me of him. My very hands will ache to wheel him about once more. The trees in the garden will whisper his name ; the mountains on which he was broken will ask me where he is ; a little grave in their midst will recall the ' gift ' that he gave. The flowers at the road-side will remind me of a withered bunch that he is taking back.

" When I am alone in the shadows of the church he will be lying there to learn the meaning of it all, beneath the Crucified. When the silence of the night descends, it will be upon his Gethsemane of pain. Sometimes I shall see him looking upon a small still figure, silent and white,

holding for the last time a pair of baby hands folded over his own crucifix.

"Yes, he means all that to me; and yet I must let him go.

"His work is not yet finished—the work he has to do. His life will be an agony, a glad agony of prayer; a work of expiation for those who libel God; a witness to Eternal love for those who doubt or fear; alone—until the day dawn, and the shadows flee away."

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